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BID ME DISCOURSE

AUTHOR OF

OLD HYDEPARK'S MONK

Vol. 1

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AND

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HURST & BLACKETT, 13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

BID ME DISCOURSE

AND

OTHER TALES

BY

MARY CECIL HAY

AUTHOR OF

"OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY,"

ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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BID ME DISCOURSE.

VOL. I.

B

BID ME DISCOURSE.

I FELT it to be a promise, though I made no answer in words: I only kissed the lips that bade me tell it all, and went silently from the room, half blinded by my tears.

But the promise shall be kept. I will take out the diary that, a year ago, I locked away, meaning never again to look upon it until as an old woman—patient and at rest—I could look back and see a glory shining on the darkest day of all. The promise shall be kept, and I will re-live last summer-time, even though its great anxiety must weigh with the old heaviness upon my heart, and bring that one anguished cry re-echoing in my ears.

* * * * *

Tuesday, July 19th, 1881.

I had sat on the pier for hours undisturbed.

says they urge it upon her. I do not forget that I am thirty-one, a terrible age—as Selina often says: regretting that she is the sister next to me, and reminding everybody that the brothers who came between us died—but surely more terrible for me than for her, for she looks so very much younger that she need not mind, while the surest sign that I look my age is the fact that no one ever asks it. I hear my sisters and their girl acquaintances chatting over their ages and birthdays, but they always leave me outside the circle of such talk. I suppose there must be in the world a great number of women who through all their lives are *overlooked*, so why should not I be one among the many?

I was thinking thus, in a new mood of jealous discontent, this very afternoon, though I was not jealous of my sisters, fashionably attired, strolling with friends and admirers up and down the pier. I was even sorry for them—as I have been often lately—when Archie Gavin, catch-

ing sight of me alone, left Reby's side and came over to me, with an eagerness which gave the lie to the affected indifference of his drawling question,

‘Where is Miss Keveene all this time, Barbara?’

‘Why ask me?’ I said, a little pettishly, ‘for you told me last night that you were uncomfortable with her.’

‘So I am. She influences me, and no man likes to be influenced.’

‘No,’ said I, sedately, letting him pass on, without telling him that a certain speck upon the sea was the little boat in which Mary Keveene had been for hours alone. Then my heart began to beat, for my eyes had gone beyond Archie's slim retreating figure, and I saw Denis coming to join us after his six hours' tramp. In his grey knickerbocker suit, coarse grey stockings, and big grey woollen Tam o'Shanter, he looked shabby rather, and not handsome, yet—as ever—his was a striking figure. A man who can never be among men, as I am among women, overlooked. Tall, wide-shouldered, with strong steadfast eyes, straight nose, and straight moustache above a square and powerful chin.

‘Where's Miss Keveene?’ he asked, in his

ful to say the bad unworthy spirit died almost suddenly as I met his earnest, unsuspecting eyes.

‘Yes, I want her. Do not you, Barbara?’

‘Archie seems to think her a disturbing element,’ I said, with an inexplicable little sigh.

‘Some women are.’

‘Fortunately for us some are not,’ he added, with a kind glance into my plain face, while I knew how his eyes must be longing for the one he sought. Denis is always so kind to me; but then, of course, father used to be fond of him, and he will always remember that and be our friend, though! I often have seen an irrepressible sarcasm parting his firm lips over some of mother’s shams.

‘Does she talk of going on soon to her relatives in Scotland?’

‘No, she says there is no hurry,’ I answered, smiling over his unthinking ‘she’ after the silent pause.

‘Your mother does not care for her?’

I noticed that he did not say ‘your sisters,’

yet they cared even less for her than mother did, and indeed I sympathised with them, for, in spite of their striking complexions and toilettes, they sink into the background beside Mary Keveene, who yet has no more colour in her cheeks than in her chin and forehead.

‘But mother will never be anything but friendly,’ I said, ‘for Uncle Steven came from Cork in the same vessel with Miss Keveene, and took a fancy to her; and when he found she was going to stay in Weymouth for a time—I believe it was a sudden decision of hers to delay her visit to Scotland—he asked mother to be kind and hospitable to her; and you know Uncle Steven doubles our income.’

‘But,’ said Denis, ‘Miss Keveene is rich enough to dispense with any hospitality or friendliness from any of us, and certainly she makes no secret of the fact that she is indifferent to it.’

‘No; my belief is that she cares for no one,’ I declared, uttering at last a thought which had rankled within me for long.

‘I think,’ said Denis, in that good way of his to me which is never unkind, yet never untruthful, ‘that she cares for you, Barry.’

He used the name that Mary herself had given

‘Well, say *almost*,’ corrected Denis, honestly. ‘She is growing to do so; I can see it in her face. I suppose she never speaks to you of her past?’

‘No; but I am not one to whom she naturally would.’

‘No!’ smiling; then in an instant grave again and puzzled. ‘Did you ever notice what terrible possibilities there are in her face?’

‘There are in all beautiful faces,’ I said, with one of my bad, spiteful feelings; and my gaze so firmly fixed upon the great white effigy of King George, cut upon the hill-side, that I did not see Denis walk on up the pier, though I understood it all when my eyes came back to rest upon the water-lilies on Selina’s sunshade, as she bore down upon me just in time to be too late for my companion. It was quite half an hour before I could summon courage to follow Denis, thinking Miss Keveene would have landed; but when I reached the steps he stood looking down, and Mary sat in her boat below, calm, cool, de-

bonair as ever. How can I describe this manner of hers, any more than I can describe her face? I remember how lamely Uncle Steven had said, 'Oh, she's young, and tall, and dark-eyed;' and as I stood looking down upon her, and she looking up, I excused Uncle Steven for not trying to go beyond this, though she seemed dark-eyed only because the grey eyes were shaded by such long, black lashes. A French assertion came into my head: 'Il faut souffrir pour être belle,' and with it a sense of compensation. Yet what a pang of jealousy was in my heart that very hour, when Denis, after briefly welcoming me, turned his gaze so hurriedly back. I—yes, I was jealous, though in the first hour I saw her I had felt inclined to cross the room and merely touch her, in a sort of gratitude to her for being so pretty!

It is not her beauty alone which puzzles me, and which I cannot understand; though there is a power in the calm grave sweep of brow and the beautiful eyes, which contrasts as strangely with the sweet tender lips, as the natural simple girlish manner contrasts with a certain indescribable bitterness most ungirl-like. That clear look in the grey Irish eyes gives the face a wonderful purity and innocence, yet there

at times bitter words are uttered by the beautiful lips, and one sees a supercilious curve in the delicate white chin, the girl seems enfolded in such an unutterable sadness, that, though when I see how her presence charms the men surrounding her I am sorry for my sisters, I am always, strange to say, sorrier for her. Still I envy her often, as I envied her, this afternoon, the ease with which she could refuse all Mr. Vesey's persuasions to leave her boat. What would I not give to be able to speak to him so coolly, so indifferently? Not like the other girls, gushing and chatting and looking amused, for she often frowns and rarely smiles; not bridling or colouring, for I have not once seen the faintest rose-tint on the creamy whiteness of her face; and never taken by surprise to tremble and be a fool like myself. It must be new to him to be treated with such utter indifference, and such plain evidence that he is nothing to her, for to so many others he is—*not* nothing. He must see that he is one among many to her, that she is the same to all, indifferent, distant, sarcastic,

yet easy, debonair, and never really ungracious. It amuses me greatly to listen to the various opinions of her, always given so freely to me, for I am one of those women who are made receptacles of other's opinions. All find fault, more or less, yet all seek her—I mean all find fault except Denis. He never does, however she treats him, and it is by this that I know he is growing to love her, and in the old-fashioned way, with single-hearted, entire devotion. Growing? Has grown; and, as I often say to myself, how could it be otherwise? Not only for the loveliness of her pale face and rich dusky hair; the eyes that darken so beautifully, yet sometimes seem to shine in rays, through the long lashes; or for that nameless grace that makes her *the* one on whom one's eyes must rest in any group; but even for that contradictory puzzling bewitchment which perplexes me, and makes me sometimes cry to myself, in pettish argument against my growing interest in her, 'No, I will not grow fond of a woman who is hard and bitter and untrustful, who believes good of no one, and certainly loves no one.' I had agreed with Uncle Steven when he spoke of Miss Keveene as high-spirited and keen-witted, but I disagreed uncomfortably when he

the girls came up to me on the pier, to speak—and talked for some time in their chatty way, but through it all Mary sat in her little boat, in the corner formed by the pier steps, only looking up when specially addressed.

‘When one’s lower lashes curl so much down, and the higher ones up, what a pert look it gives a face,’ observed Clara to me in a whisper, and I tried to smile and assent, because I was sorry for them all, seeing that one of Miss Keveene’s glances was more to Denis than all their entertainment and badinage.

I think it was because he stood so persistently ready to assist her, that Mary did not show the slightest inclination to land, for not till all had gone but he, and she must have seen he was not to be evaded, did she leave the boat. And then she hurried after us, and walked among us, talking very little, but when she did almost cruelly, it seemed to me, in jesting cynicism of the people around us, and utterly indifferent to, or unconscious of, the very marked observation she elicited, even in her plain blue cloth dress, with only a band of the same colour round her

black and white sailor hat, and leathern gaunt-lets half way up her arms. With the bearing of a princess, and that lovely face, was it strange that no one could compare with her among all we met?

‘How soon people get into the way of staring at any new face,’ Selina said, as we strolled to the esplanade; but of course she knew Mary Keveene had not been as long in Weymouth as we had.

Just then mother met us, and asked Mary to dine with us that evening, while I coloured with vexation because I knew she could not accept such a chilling invite; and took refuge in gazing up at the ugly statue a loyal town is raising to the king who once patronised it.

‘Thank you, Mrs. Oswell, not to-day,’ said Mary, quietly; and mother tried not to look relieved. Even here, as in our Queen Anne house in Chiswick, mother cannot resist getting up little dinners for two or three well selected young men, and how can she honestly welcome Mary when she cannot prevent Archie Gavin turning from Reby’s glowing face to gaze into the clear sweet depths of Mary’s wonderful eyes, and have no attention to bestow on others while he needs all his not too abundant wits to keep alert

‘Barbara,’ said Mary, rather suddenly, as Denis escorted mother over to our rooms, Selina on his other side, ‘will you come in, after your dinner, and have coffee in my room? They will spare you then, and I’m sick of myself and of Silla.’

‘Who is Silla?’ I asked, feebly; while I cogitated over the possibility of joining her, surprised at myself for being so glad.

‘My maid, she calls herself, but sometimes I get the fancy she is a dragon perpetually watching me, and I fly from her eyes—and her mouth.’

‘Is she so ——?’

‘So harmless, so industrious, so everything that’s meek,’ said Mary, with a curt laugh. ‘She is only a dragon to my disordered fancy when—wanting solitude, yet hating the self who needs must share my solitude—I join her, and let her watch me.’

‘What a curious name Silla is!’

‘Oh, her name is Drusilla, of course. I only

chose those syllables to remind me that even that horror has a lower depth—a Charybdis beyond.’

‘Why do you keep her?’ I inquired, in my practical way.

‘I am rich, you know, and, when my uncle’s money came to me, of course I forgot how to do anything for myself, as I had done everything for three and twenty years before. It was an utter necessity for me to have a maid. She is Irish, with the hideous mouth of the normal Irishwoman, and sometimes, when I watch it, I positively tremble lest it should open.’

‘Why did you choose this Drusilla?’

‘Oh, I like her. You don’t understand. Any other maid would be worse.’

Then I watched her into the great hotel which used to be King George’s summer residence, and noticed her unconscious reception of the looks of interest and admiration given by a little group of gentlemen in the portico; and while she went on, enfolded, as it seemed to me, in a mystery that kept her solitary, I wondered how the same girl could be so nervously timid of a mere servant, and yet so indifferent to all the men who sought her favour.

It was comparatively early when, our dinner

she went back to the same position when she had taken my hat and fur collar, and drawn me an easy-chair near her, putting her book away. She had on a soft, white dress, with a band of dead-gold satin round the waist, and soft falling laces at the neck and wrists, and, though it was a very simple dress, yet in the tender evening light she looked so beautiful that even I could scarcely turn my eyes away. I was as willing to sit in silence as she was; indeed, it is a treat to me, and not one I can often indulge in. It was an exquisite evening, and the shrill, glad voices of the children could not disturb the low, slow music of the sea. But, though I sat looking out, my thoughts were on the beautiful girlish form near me. Rich, and young, and beautiful, yet looking unhappy, as she was looking then! What use was wealth to her? What could it give her save costly clothing, and could she look less lovely, whatever she wore? I smiled as I thought of the difference from my-

self; how I might spend a fortune on myself, and know it wasted!

‘It was kind of you to come,’ said Mary at last, for a moment arching her white fingers above her eyes, as she looked far over the shining waters of the Channel, ‘from your cheerful party.’

‘I like this,’ said I, in my usual unvarnished manner, waking to the conviction that, though I was silent, I had not been, as is usual with me in any society, thinking what I could say. ‘I cannot listen from our windows. There is so much noise within, that I cannot hear those lapping little waves come in to their dreamy end upon the shore.’

‘From who knows how far and deep an impulse!’ put in Mary, almost hurriedly. ‘Can you ever feel quite gay by the sea, Barry? Doesn’t it drink all gladness into itself? Yet to-morrow it will weary me, labouring with the mighty secret it can never tell; longing for the perfect rest it can never win. A weary monster, hungry, tireless, homeless, hopeless, endless.’

‘What different moods you have,’ I said, smiling. ‘But that is no new thought of mine. I sometimes feel you have a different mood

with the sound of it in my ears, and the love of it in my heart.'

'You lived near it?'

'Once.'

'Then went away?'

'No. Then ceased to live at all.'

I could not answer. I knew many people would show a sympathy which would woo her on to confidence, but I am so awkward. I stop to think, and that is fatal.

'You mean when you grew rich?' I hazarded at last.

'When I grew poor,' she corrected, with a painful laugh; 'years before my Australian uncle's fortune came to me as next of kin—to me, a village schoolmistress on the Irish coast! That was only six months ago, but since those other awful days—how many years is it? Three long years; and I have seen no beauty since in anything or anyone.'

'But then it was different?' I suggested, stupidly.

‘Then! Oh, the freshness and gladness of the spring, with its promised wealth of bud, and bloom, and verdure! Oh, the scents and tints from those cottage windows of mine! The sunlight on the trees or water! Do the wild flowers clothe the valleys *now* all summer time, from the hawthorn bloom till the acorns fall? Does the heath make the hill-side lovely? Do the birds in very gladness set to music all the poems of the flowers? Not now,’ she said, pushing the dusky hair from her white forehead. ‘They all teach one bitter lesson now—Love for love, hate for hate, life for life.’

I never had much money at a time; but at that moment I would have given all I had to know how to say what would soothe those low concentrated tones, and cool the feverish brightness of the beautiful eyes. I thought of everything—a hundred things—and the more I thought the less I knew. Just then there burst an old melody from a feeble cornet very much out of tune, and this put a common-place remark into my head.

‘You were very much surprised, I suppose, to inherit such a fortune?’

‘Surprised!’ The straight, delicate brows came down into a frown, and I saw then that

to man's horror—"past feeling"?"

'I would not like to be so, Mary.'

'No,' she said, speaking uncertainly, almost as if in a dream; 'but you have not had heartache eating your very life, until—until— Can you fancy being conscious of such a terrible capacity for evil that you don't know whether you *will* do the evil, or have already *done* it? Until you don't know which is worse—the power to do the wrong without the will to prevent, or the consciousness of having done it without the will to repent.'

'Mary, you want change,' said I, anxiously.

'Change? No, I have change for ever. It is rest I want, and sleep. Who says of sleep, "A heritage it seems to me, worth being *poor* to hold in fee." Why, poverty is sometimes as sweet as sleep itself. Barbara,'—she suddenly rose and stretched her hands before her—'why do you let me talk to you so? When you kindly come to cheer me, I have no right to even remember what Silla calls my *bad rest*. It will be all right some day,' pressing her white fingers

on the fringed lids, 'and I shall sleep. "Her goggling eyes eternal slumbers shade;" is that it? Come, let us go out of this great aching place.'

'Yes,' said I, stupidly, wondering why her room should be a great aching place to her when she looked so easily and prettily at home in it, especially just then, for a waiter had brought in the coffee, and she began daintily presiding at the little table he had drawn to her side.

'We will go out and see the people,' she said, but looked the while into the calm, fair sky, as the music of the band in the gardens came to us in softened tones. 'Barry, I have a thought,' she went on presently. 'I will give a picnic on Portland Island. A lunch in the prettiest part—if there are any pretty parts—at two o'clock, and entire independence of action before and after. Will that do, or is it too unconventional? I will ask those you think your mother and sisters will like, and arrange with the waiters here; but you and I will go over together early, and see the island first—catching a glimpse of the convicts, perhaps—we two only, if your mother will spare you. We can afterwards think how to end the day.'

I smiled at the notion of there being a doubt

who always walks beside him. Don't you pity her ?

‘No,’ I said, looking down upon the pretty face, ‘I could pity her if she were plain and—growing old.’

Mary turned sharply, and looked into my thin plain face.

‘Only then?’ she queried. ‘Do youth and prettiness save us from our greatest troubles? The horror of seeing, of watching,—ah!’ with a sudden change, ‘that girl’s heart is full, and she has to walk to and fro, to and fro, hours, and hours, and hours, every day ; meeting girls with lovers, with mothers, with fathers, with sisters; laughing, happy, merry-hearted girls ; and she will not know what she has missed till youth and prettiness are gone, and a cough and restless nights—Barry, are you ever wicked and mean enough to wonder why we were any of us born? No, I see you never were. Forgive me, dear. I suppose they will be looking for you in the gardens, especially Mr. Vesey,’ with a tender

smile, as she tried to cheer me. 'Poor boy!'

'Boy!' echoed I, astonished, but rather glad she had—so unlike herself—brought up Denis's name, because often I should like, for his sake, to speak to her of him, if there would not come that lump in my throat. 'One would think you forty. Do you know his age, Mary?'

'I know,' she answered, in her quietly careless way, 'that he is as much older than I am, as I feel older than he.'

'He looks, and is, ten years older than you,' I said, stoutly; 'and, if you knew him better, you would not utter—would not even listen to—a slighting word of him. He lives a very noble life, though in the past, through his father's extravagance, he has had even poverty to bear.'—'Even!' interpolated Miss Keveene, icily derisive—'And to bear it nobly requires the very highest kind of manliness. Don't you think so?'

'Ah! a plaintive little question to wind up your uncharacteristic outburst, and prove you Barbara still.'

'And then he paid all his father's debts, and now he is at the very top of his profession; and you would not believe what good he does, both in it and in his private life.'

'No, I should not,' she answered, chillingly.

‘a woman’s life is never complete alone.’

‘It is never spoiled and darkened and destroyed alone,’ said Mary, rapidly. ‘But why do you speak so staunchly for Mr. Vesey, yet never for yourself?’

‘Because his whole heart is set on you,’ I answered, boldly, ‘and it is pathetic in me to see the change in him. I am sure he never loved before. He has been always courteous and kind and attentive to women, but never in love.’

‘Wise Sir Pelleas!’ laughed Mary, carelessly. ‘Loved all maidens, but no maid. Barry, you have your knowledge of men from books, not life.’

‘Of Denis I have knowledge from life,’ I said, resolutely. ‘And, as for my knowledge of books, it is little enough, as Denis himself would tell you. Only yesterday I covered myself with confusion by mixing up Horne Tooke and Hookham Frere, when Denis was talking of one of them; I think I considered them one man, but, at any rate, I did not know the difference.

I am still as stupid as I was twenty years ago, when Denis gave me Longfellow's poems on my birthday, and I opened and read "The Village Blacksmith" first, and was so delighted that I wrote *My favourite* over it, without trying another. How Denis laughed! Mary, I added, earnestly, 'do you dislike Mr. Vesey?'

'Yes,' she said, without a moment's hesitation.

'Do you hate all gentlemen?'

'I hate all gentlemen, and I hate all barristers, and, as Mr. Vesey is a gentleman as well as a barrister, I hate him doubly.'


'He is immensely respected and sought after in his profession,' I put in, idiotically; for what woman ever loved a man for his professional success? 'And he is very well off now, and a thorough English gentleman.'

'I remember,' said Mary, idly, 'how a French traveller writes of the English young gentleman as "highly learned, and clever, but *not* a gentleman." You cannot contradict a learned Frenchman, can you? Now shall we go? Silla,'—to the maid whom she had summoned—'get me a hat and my seal coat.'

'Where is it, then, Miss Mary?' asked the young Irishwoman, placidly. "'Tisn't in the bed-room, without it's here.'

I should be afraid of anybody—sometimes.

As we walked along the parade, her silence was gone, and she talked, as I had often heard her, with cold, light cynicism of the people whom we met, and did not seem even aware of the glances of admiration that followed her. Everybody seemed to be in the gardens, as usual, and Mary was won from me at once. It was but natural. I am accustomed to sit aside and look and listen, and I can interest myself in my own quiet, spectator-like way. This evening it amused me much to listen to the many criticisms of Mary Keveene, as she passed and re-passed, with that prettily indolent air that has no inertness, and is so different from Selina's languor. When she ceased to walk and came and sat by me, I thought it could only be for a little time, and that she would soon accede to one of the frequent requests to 'take another turn;' but she said 'No' persistently to the gentlemen who asked her, equally coldly and easily, yet, it seemed to me, differently to all, and still sat near me, silent, and with her head



half turned away. She wore a lacey white hat, with a mass of soft feathers weighing down the broad brim, and this hid all from me save the curve of a round white cheek, the curl of the beautiful lashes, and the profile of a delicate little chin. I began to think nothing had ever suited her so well as this big hat, with its brim pinched into curious dents and curves: but then I had always thought every fresh thing she wore became her better than the last, because to each she lent her own exquisite grace and beauty.

Suddenly—so suddenly, I fear, as to show her that I started—she turned with a heavy sigh, and broke this silence, which, before to-day, had been unusual with her; broke it in that sweetly careless way of hers which, though cold, is never unfeeling. And as she did so, there came over me the curious sensation that she and I were drifting from the people around us—a ridiculously romantic notion for anyone so commonplace as I. Next moment I saw that Archie and Uncle Steven had sat down upon her other side.

‘Have you offended Vesey, Miss Keveene?’ Archie asked her. ‘He does not look too amiable to-night.’

‘It is the bottle-green coat,’ said Mary, briefly.

must own I have occasionally heard some curious, and not too complimentary, remarks touching Vesey's appearance.'

'Trust you English!' said Uncle Steven, too shrewd not to see through Archie's jealousy. 'If we men have sense enough to vary our costumes between the Dog-Days and December, we excite all kinds of remark. Why, I've seen the ex-Attorney-General of the United States walk the whole mile down Broadway with his coat over his arm, fanning himself with a huge palm-leaf, and no one looking surprised or quizzical in the very slightest degree.'

'Oh, Vesey doesn't care how people look at him. He cares neither for the eye nor the voice of the public,' said Archie, in a tone I hated. 'Why, Miss Keveene, I actually saw him one winter morning sweeping the snow from before the door of his own house in Kensington.'

'He would look a gentleman doing that,' said Uncle Steven, bluntly; 'and a man is a noodle who lets his muscles rust.'

‘But a man might find other ways of exercising his muscles,’ suggested Miss Keveene.

‘So he does, many ways; and I’ll tell you that an hour after I heard of his sweeping the snow—and there was a reason for that—I heard him making his fine old grand talk, as Gavin would give the world to be able to do. That’s the music I like, as I smoke there in the half light, without any jarring words. He may play what he chooses, it is all good, but perhaps I am fondest of Schubert’s Sonatas.’

‘Schubert’s Sonatas according to Denis,’ whispered Mary to me; but of course I could not smile, it sounded so unkind,

‘I can fancy, Miss Keveene,’ said Archie, attempting to speak low, ‘how exquisitely you play.’

‘I do not play at all,’ she answered, coolly, just as Denis joined us and drew a chair near.

Now I do play—though very seldom asked—but I actually envied her her indifference over risking Denis Vesey’s contempt for her deficiency in a talent—or rather an accomplishment—now so universal.

‘Then of course you would make a good listener,’ observed Archie, maliciously, when Uncle Steven left us.

whether felt or unfelt, while their thoughts—'

'Do often lie too deep for tears,' quoted Denis, in an odd way, as if he, gazing at her as he was, had read her speech differently from what we had, and did not hesitate to let her see this. But Mary might not even have heard, for the unconcerned manner in which she spoke to me.

'Barry, look at those gorgeous pink dresses. I see now that the use of sea-side promenades is to give us platforms on which to wear out our tarnished evening attire.'

'Those are devoted sisters,' said I, angry with her inconsiderate remark, and therefore looking quite cordially upon the two girls in the ridiculous pink silk elaborations.

'The lady with them is French,' resumed Mary, calmly critical, and unmoved by my fleeting wrath. 'Do you notice how seldom Frenchwomen have any bones or any starch? Their laces and silks are limp, their forms indescribably malleable.'

'Not to mention plain, in this instance, too,' sup-

plemented Archie, while Denis looked straight out among the crowd, with perfectly grave, stern lips.

‘You should be the last to say it, Mr. Gavin,’ said Mary. ‘According to Byron, no man under thirty ought to know there is a plain woman in the world. Though’—cynically—‘he knew it of course—no one better.’

Then I spoke, but hurriedly and awkwardly, as is my wont, and seizing on the first thing I saw, because Denis’s gaze troubled me.

‘Aren’t those two old gentlemen sociable, having their Bath-chairs wheeled side by side?’

‘Oh yes, I passed them just now,’ said Mary; ‘and—yes, they seemed very friendly and sociable, and interesting; exceedingly so. One asked, eagerly, “How much? How much?” and the other said, with intense and thoughtful mournfulness, “Only 7 per cent. No more, I fear, no more.” Yes, they know how to thoroughly enjoy their holiday, you see.’

‘You think very meanly of your fellow-creatures, Miss Keveene,’ observed Archie, bending to her ridiculously, as if he were telling her a secret.

‘Or rather, speak disparagingly of them,’ amended Denis, quietly; and at that moment

her away—into happiness.’

‘She was learning lessons,’ explained Mary, without the faintest blush, though there was a tell-tale tenderness both in his voice and eyes. ‘I was a schoolmistress for many years, and so I know that lessons are unpleasant.’

‘And you *did* long to comfort her? I knew it. Yet you speak now as if——’

‘Oh, I often look into the windows,’ she interrupted, negligently, ‘when a light allows me. It is one of my idle habits. In one window, not far from here, there is an old couple always together—always. It positively fills me with terror to see them so wrapped up in each other.’

‘Why?’ I inquired, in my usually prosaic way; though I was quite sure Mary had shivered as she spoke.

‘Why!’ she echoed, her eyes literally seeming ablaze behind the wonderful lashes, as she gazed into the band of calm gold light above the western horizon. ‘When the wretch comes what will

they do? People don't go hand in hand even to heaven. One *must* be left. What were we speaking of before? Oh,'—in a quite changed tone—'the windows I so meanly look into, as Mr. Vesey reminded me. Barry, there are two quite up in the town, in no fashionable part, and all day long, and all night, I believe, at any rate, whenever I have passed, there's a woman sewing in one, and a man writing in the other; both pale and solitary; each working hard all day near the window, and at night burning one feeble candle. The problem constantly worrying me is—why don't they meet, and burn the two candles in one room? Think of that advantage, as well as the rent saved.'

'And the cheery relief of having one another to speak to,' added Denis, smiling. 'Does not that view commend itself to you with the saving gained?'

'No,' said Mary, recklessly. 'My life has been devoted to saving, and I appreciate that advantage best. Besides, after all, they would most probably not work half so well disturbed by each other. Each would mar the other's work.'

'I do not know why they should,' Denis said, gravely. 'I believe people are, as a rule, better than we think them; even better than they think

over these sudden changes in the girl whom Denis loves, and her heedless revelation of captious, censorious thoughts. Then she went calmly on.

‘Opposite to the hotel in Bristol, where I stayed after landing, there is the house of a young physician, and you can never believe what its windows cost me, Barbara. My firm belief is that he had not any patients at all, yet surely he did all that was possible towards getting them. He had flowers in the windows, bought freshly every morning, I am sure, regardless of expense; and pretty statuettes, always turned unselfishly to face the street. He had a model servant, kept on purpose to answer the bell the moment it rang, and far too superior to do anything else; and he awaited them all day, and burned a great red lamp all night to allure them. Beyond these weariful outlays, what could he do? He could scarcely go out and knock down a rich old lady that he might take her home and cure her; and if he had tried to propagate scarlet fever in the town it would

of course only have seized the very poor, who could not pay—Barry, don't look at me as if I were a lunatic. It was a most tangled sensation really, for how could I wish patients for this poor fellow, who did his best to get them, without wishing suffering to somebody ?'

'I think it was his solitude affected you,' said Denis, quietly, 'though you profess to love it yourself. When we drove to Lulworth yesterday, you isolated yourself all the time, even in the storm ; yet I cannot help fancying you were alarmed.'

'You found me very soon,' she said, in her cold, gentle way, 'but I cannot fancy even a thunderstorm making me alarmed.' Then there fell over the beautiful face a strange momentary shadow which haunts me a little curiously, as if just for that second I had had a glimpse of Mary's past—or future.

'And you think solitude is better than the union between two?' Denis asked it very gently, gazing straight into her face, while I turned aside, looking in a vacant manner among the lights on the esplanade.

'Indeed I do,' she answered, with perfect ease. 'I have a most pious horror of what Queen Mary calls that sort of religion.'

love,' Mary went on, unconcernedly, though she must have seen, as I did, that strange perplexity which I had noticed more than once before in his steadfast regard of her, 'I was reading only this very evening some words I remember, and that are very true:—"Sir, quoth I, your age doth not yet bear that you should perfectly know what love meaneth. It is the foolishhest thing, the most impatient, most hasty, and most without respect that can be."'

'Who says that?' I asked, wishing I had taken cognisance of the old book I had found her reading.

'A very clever statesman ; one who well knew the world.'

'I think,' said Denis, earnestly, 'that One, who knows the world as no statesman ever knew it yet, has given us love as the highest impulse of our lives—knowing exactly what those lives need.'

'It has not been given to me at all,' said Mary, coldly ; and 'Twenty love-sick maidens

we' went the harassing words in my brain to the air from a dozen instruments, while we were all silent. Presently others joined us, and we went to walk until the day slowly and beautifully died; when Mary Keveene and I once more sat together. Then Denis came up to us, asking quietly, and I thought for him a little proudly, if it were not late enough to leave. I rose at once, though Mary took no notice.

'Do you know, Miss Keveene,' he said, with that puzzled glance at her that I have noticed many times, though I fancied he could only see, as I could, the delicate profile of chin and cheek, and a glimpse of the round white throat; 'your face gives me back a strange haunting memory which I cannot grasp. Can you help me?'

'No,' she said, and then was silent; while I, watching her, saw, to my astonishment, a slow blush, which saddened me as if it told of pain, yet was most beautiful, never touching her forehead, but seeming to brighten and deepen the red of her sweet, sensitive lips.

'Do you know Devon?' he went on, in his quiet, courteous way.

'No,' she said, answering readily, but without looking at him; and then she added, slowly and swiftly, 'Why do you ask?'

....
'And you can give me no solution of this odd sensation?'

'No,' she repeated, and then I found that, white as her face had always been, save for that one momentary blush, it could grow whiter still; and I doubted whether I could indeed have really seen that soft pink colour where there was so sorrowful a pallor now.

'You forgive me?' he questioned, gently, as she rose; but she only bent her head and walked away in silence; I at her side—though of no use or comfort to her.

Friday, July 22nd, 1881.

This was the day of Mary Keveene's picnic to Portland Island, and, according to her arrangement, I breakfasted with her, that we two might start early and independently. My sisters wondered over our choosing to waste so many hours alone, fatiguing ourselves and growing hot and dusty and dishevelled before the hour of assembling; but I am sure the wonder

touched Mary only, as they knew too well that it made little difference to me whether my dress was fresh or my face cool; I was in any case so little likely to be noticed. We were to lunch at Bow and Arrow Castle at two o'clock, and when I joined Mary she had given all the necessary orders, and by nine we were ready to start. It is quite a habit now of ours to spend several hours of each day together, and though I am still puzzled often by her moods, and positively wounded sometimes by her mistrust and cynicism, I am each day drawn more and more, almost unwillingly, within her strong yet gentle influence. One day she really offended me, in a humour of passionate coldness, but her ready, wistful apology and fearless acknowledgment of wrong, her generous refutation of the slightest provocation on my part, and humble, loving entreaty for a kiss, were so different from our cool way at home of accosting each other after any disagreement, that afterwards I loved her better than before.

'I am expecting great enjoyment to-day, Mary,' I said. 'Do you believe in anticipations?'

'No—oh, no,' she answered, hurriedly. 'And it is Friday, too! Why did I pick out Friday when I had six days of the week to choose


alone, leaving to your sisters that pretty Mr. Gavin and the pensive curate, and—not to mention others?’

‘It is a question for you, not for me,’ I said, smiling at her pause. ‘Denis Vesey is the only person difficult to be evaded, and it is not I whom he will go forth to intercept.’

‘Nor anyone,’ said Mary, calmly. ‘I don’t forget that you described him to me as a stern, inflexible ascetic. I am quite sure that—“For *him* by sad experience wise, at rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes, *his* heart no longer flutters.”’

‘No, not at rosy cheeks. But at last he woos in earnest, Mary, and in what I call a quite old-fashioned way.’

‘Appropriate to buckled shoes, lace ruffles, and a powdered cue,’ suggested Mary, drily. ‘Now I am ready. What a sun we shall have all day upon our faces! O ruddier than the cherry—that I shall sing this evening to my nose. O browner than the berry—that I shall address to the rest of my classic countenance.



Why didn't I borrow that ugly linen hat of Mr. Vesey's in which he looks so like a wandering Bedouin, or perhaps a Nawab? Has he been in India?

'Yes, three years ago; on some professional business—and literary too, I think.'

'Oh! he writes! Novels? No, I thought not, as you described him so inflexible. Do his writings also give one that subtle suggestion of the powdered cue and ruffles?'

'I told you that was the change in him since he has known you. Yet—don't you be deceived—he has the blood of his forbears in him, and one of them shot an Italian dead on the spot for paying a compliment to his wife.'

'Insanity? What a good thing he is the last of his race! Don't look so shocked, my Barbara. Woman is divided into two classes. First, woman whom everybody likes in a general way, and nobody especially loves; and, second, woman who is not liked, yet will win one—— Come.'

'Go on, Mary.'


'Go on with what?' she asked, coolly; yet her fingers were a little nervous over fastening her hat.

'Finish what you were going to say, for you

that was always a fatal habit, even back in the days of Naaman, wasn't it? Now I am ready;' and she stood before me, fair and cool, with a wreath of pink convolvulus round the small straw hat, whose brim was squeezed into a shadowy poke above her lustrous eyes.

'I positively don't think,' I declared, 'that you could look fast, even in a jockey cap, or—or unrefined even in a Tam o' Shanter. What are you going to wear to-night?' For mother had elected to give a little carpet dance as a conclusion to Mary's picnic, and I was accustomed to hear discussions on these matters; though, to my mind, among us the real art of dress was never studied. Selina always knew what was fashionable, and what was called artistic; and the others followed in her lead, whether the garments suited them or not; evidently that was not to be of any moment, for the wearer must adapt herself to the garment.

As we chatted, we walked quickly to the station, anxious to leave Weymouth unperceived.



Once Mary gave a start when we met Denis's retriever walking sedately down from the station with the *Times* in his mouth, but I knew he fetched the paper every morning, so I had no fear of his master being near. When Mary rejoined me on the platform, after taking our tickets—for she declared I was her guest to-day, and must do nothing but enjoy myself—she looked at me a little quizzically, her eyes bright with excitement.

‘I was on the point of taking third-class tickets, Barbara; I only remembered just in time. Old habits cling to one, and I never used to travel otherwise. Are you very much ashamed of me?’

I laughed, because there was so little abashment for herself in the eyes which, with all their radiance, had more of sadness in them than of mirth.

‘You must be glad that you have no need to do so now,’ I said, in my matter-of-fact way; but once more that slow, pink flush rose in her cheeks, and I knew how wrong was my surmise.

‘I would travel third-class all my life for one journey like those old ones!’ she said; and for the first time in my life I understood what it meant to hear tears in a voice. ‘I have for-

days! For even a *dream* of the—dead!

Of course I thought it would soothe her to change this subject; but I soon found, as I so often do, how little I understood the strength, as well as pride, of her reticent nature.

‘They were nearly always amusing journeys,’ she added, quite suddenly calm. ‘I remember once, in London, just as the train was leaving one of the underground stations, a porter at the door of our carriage—I mean the carriage I was in—hurried in two chimney sweeps, who were looking for seats. Barbara, if you had but seen the glance one gave the other when they were safely in, and his gravely uttered cogitation, “Now, ’ow did he know as we wuz third-class passengers?” Do my old surroundings startle you? I remember once hearing a smart girl, who sat next to me, whisper to her mother to hide the tickets, that their fellow-passengers should not see they were third-class. And as for civility, I’ve heard a guard ask a poor man for his ticket in a tone which said, quite plainly, “Never mind, if you haven’t one;

I'll make it all right with the directors." Not'—with a droll little smile—'always, of course. But, indeed, Barbara, I am in earnest. Why, the very last journey we—I took, an old woman was ill, and I could not describe to you the sympathy and anxiety of all those poor people—poor by courtesy, as they were travelling cheaply. It was a suffocating day, yet all the windows were closed in an instant, lest a breath of air should be bad for her; and one girl went on to a station beyond her destination, because the old woman had fallen asleep against her arm. Oh, Barbara, what lessons do I learn in my travelling *now*? What good is the attention I win *now*? What does it avail me that the guards say, "please," and "ladies," now? I—I hate these different journeys.'

'I think each position has its good side, perhaps,' I said, with a frail idea of this being the sort of thing Denis might say.

'Perhaps so,' she answered, coldly. 'And I suppose this is our train.'

Mary seated herself beside an old gentleman, who began at once to talk to her, drifting into events which must have happened years before her birth, and introducing each with, 'If you recollect.' Mary answered in that easy, gentle

land from the coast. Opposite to me was an august lady of middle age, who left the train at Rodwell, and then turned and offered her hand in farewell to a friend who had entered the carriage with her at Weymouth, but to whom she had not spoken on the way. 'I presume we shall not meet again,' she observed, rigidly; but the other answered, with a sort of cheerful spasm, 'Oh! I don't see why not.' 'But I do,' was the stately retort. 'I shall neither visit you again, nor invite you to visit me.' And Mary's glance at me was irresistible.

There were no courtier clouds attendant on the sun this morning. He shone unveiled upon us when we came out from the Portland Station, to be assailed by numerous all too willing guides.

'Why should we not wander at will, and explore as we choose?' I asked Mary, in a semi-whisper, while she stood patiently detained by a dejected individual with boots cut skilfully open, possibly to give free play to his feet, but

certainly to give us an unimpeded view of his stockings. He followed us, though other visitors came within his ken, and overtook and clung to us so unobtrusively and resignedly (when we tried to walk away from him) that we were obliged to accept the valuable services so modestly proffered. He could show us everything on the island as no other guide could, and bring us nearer to the convicts (so he assured Mary) than any other man ever born.

‘I know he will cheat us,’ she explained aside to me, ‘and we shall have no independence; but I saw you could not resist the melancholy tones, Barry.’

‘We can drop him presently,’ said I, looking on him with a very different expression from Mary’s half humorous, half sarcastic interest. ‘He has a very disreputable appearance, and we shall soon know our own way about.’

‘Cause and effect,’ smiled Mary, as we went up the steep street at a snail’s pace; not that there was anything noteworthy to detain us, but because it agreed best with our melancholy leader’s financial projects and rheumatic ankles. He obliged us to pause continually, and always began to speak as if he had a great deal to

last. Mary was looking away to the languid sea, now we had reached the height, but I was searching the hideously uncultivated stony scene around us.

‘I have power to show you them quite close,’ he answered, in his very unassuming way. ‘I can take you where no one else on the island can. You will see all with *me*.’

‘I have no doubt we could see them just as easily alone,’ whispered Mary. ‘But why do you wish it so, Barry? Isn’t there wickedness enough in everyone we meet, without desiring such a conglomeration of it?’

I could see that hers was frank and honest contempt; but I could not deny that I wished to see the convicts, nor could I resist talking about them as we crept on.

‘Surely sometimes a prisoner escapes?’ I said; but our guide answered sadly that it had occurred only once, he thought. ‘The men were making the reservoir, miss; I’ll show it you presently’—‘No haste,’ interpolated Mary, drolly—‘There came on a dense fog, and one man

swam away. No one knows whether he was picked up or whether he landed, but afterwards the governor received his prison clothes back, with thanks for the loan. I'll show you the reservoir. With me you are sure to see everything worth seeing.'

'Now, here we are,' this with a moan, when at last we were among the quarries, and Mary appeared to be still pondering his story. 'The quarries are closed while the prisoners are at work. They will be going to dinner at eleven o'clock, and I will show you them near.'

We paused just then at an iron turnstile on the roadside, and looked through. Above us an armed sentinel walked slowly to and fro on a raised path overlooking the quarry, and where he turned another sentinel took up the march. I gazed first into Mary's sweet, pale face as she looked through the iron bars, then into the distance. At first I could not distinguish any figures save the darkly clad ones of the warders, because the convict dress is just the colour of the stone they work on, but presently their movement revealed them to me, swarming, as it seemed, about those dark figures that were idle and watchful while they were busy ; yet surely had harder work to do, and looked so few among

genuine, honest indignation against these out-laws.

‘When we have looked at the important objects I have to show you, ladies,’ murmured our keeper, ‘I will take you where you can distinctly see the gangs as they return to their work at one o’clock.’

‘But that will be two hours hence,’ intimated Mary, humbly.

‘Yes, miss, it will,’ with resolute meekness; ‘but I’ve a great deal to show you.’

Of course he had not a great deal, but what he had took a great deal of time, and so the two hours were over when we found ourselves in the same spot again, with no distinct remembrance of anything beyond having been lured by eagerly trading children into buying various lumps of what they called congealed water, found in the quarries, and of vainly trying several times to dismiss our guide.

‘Now, ladies,’ he gently sighed, stopping at the little inn called the ‘Clifton Arms,’ ‘they

know *me* here, and will show you into a room upstairs where you'll see the convicts come from their dinner, nearer than anyone else on the island can. I'll wait below.'

Mary stopped to pay and discharge him, and, with melancholy consideration for us, he at last accepted payment for five hours' attendance. Then we followed a pleasant young woman upstairs into a prim room, jealously shut in with Venetian blinds, which she drew up, and muslin ones, which she took down.

'Of course,' said Mary, looking round when we were left alone, 'we could not have gained access to this public room in a wayside inn without the influential interest of our guide, philosopher, and friend. Oh, Barbara, what a world of shams this is!'—which made me smile, of course, for she had been his mildest dupe. Then I called her to the window, for the grey figures, carrying their implements, were tramping two and two along the quarry paths, the dark forms scattered here and there among them. I tried to count the number of men in each gang, and thought it must be five and twenty; but, as I could not be sure, I turned presently to ask Mary. She had gone away from me, and was walking up and down the

have thought this morning's experience would have totally unfitted you ever to hasten again. I suppose we must order something. We need not touch it, and can leave money on the tray.'

So Mary left a half-crown beside the untasted lemonade, and then we went downstairs to find our guide imbibing beer with pensive wariness. And, indeed, I was not surprised that Mary spoke so proudly to him, when he persistently maintained that his further society would be a necessity to us.

Free at last, we strolled across the fields behind the inn, when there happened what I had all the morning been prepared for. We were not conscious where we were going, only that, through the soft and dreamy air, we could hear the slow, lazy wash of the waves upon the Chesil beach, when Denis came up to us, in his boating flannels, his grave face brightening in the frankest manner when he met Mary's eyes.

'At last!' he said. 'I rowed to Fern Cave, fancying you would be there. I hoped to

be in time to show you all you cared to see.'

'Oh, we have had a guide,' said Mary, carelessly; 'a good man who grew so much attached to us that he would not part with us under half a sovereign, and then not without a struggle.'

'Miss Keveene, this is all the heath I can find yet in blossom here. Please take it; you told me you loved it. Now, of course, your wish is to see the convicts.'

'Why should it be?' inquired Mary, calmly fastening the heath at her neck—though we went the while with Denis out into the road, and back towards the prison. 'Why should we care so much to see an accumulation of crime? Barbara, was not our guide enough for you; for surely he was a convict once, or is to be, else why that cunning glance in his mournful eye?'

'Miss Keveene, you should wear green glasses when you try to be hard on your fellow-creatures,' observed Denis, tranquilly.

'Surely you feel what a terrible life this imprisoned one is for men to lead,' I said, with a glance into her thoughtful eyes.

'Only what they deserve.'

'For some—yes,' acquiesced Denis, 'and the very justice of the punishment for some makes

done one wrong act, for which, apart from all other punishment, he suffers, in every hour of the day and night, acute remorse and penitence. Think of his herding for years with ruffians and semi-idiot; brutal villains—no, that is an insult to the brutes—hardened villains, not only guilty of hideous and barbarous crimes, but actually revelling in the anticipation of committing others; professional, life-long thieves, born in the prison or workhouse, growing up in an atmosphere of vice until no other is endurable to them—very devils, who don't know what conscience means! Surely, even a day's incarceration with such vile associates, would be punishment enough for one unrepeatd crime such as I spoke of.'

'Evidently you have a sympathy with these convicts and criminals, Mr. Vesey,' said Mary, with chill disdain.

'In a certain sense, I have,' returned Denis, gravely. 'It is my hope to do something towards changing the punishment for such as those. But,' throwing off his seriousness, 'we

need not think of that to-day. See, there is a little gang of convicts at work just where we shall pass, and only one warder needed to them all. I notice Barbara is far more ready to study them than you are, Miss Keveene.'

'It is a dreary and disappointing study,' Mary said.

'Oh, they are just like ordinary workmen,' I put in, as one young man, his white unsheltering cap pushed back upon his sunburnt face, looked down unabashed upon us from his ladder.


'Some of even those were horrible faces,' said Mary, hurrying, and actually shuddering when we had passed; 'and how fearful for them to have to raise by their own hands these great prison walls that shut them in!'

'Look over here, Miss Keveene,' said Denis, showing us, in the pretty garden of the governor's house, a man in blue, and with hair of ordinary length—indeed, longer than Denis's—working on his knees among the flower-beds, while a dainty little maiden of five or six stood talking to him.

'The men in blue are serving their last three months,' Denis explained, 'and their hair is allowed to grow. Any friend of that fellow's could recognise him now, don't you think, while

ing—what? It would change, you think? Oh, what nonsense we are talking!’ she added, with a smile, as Denis returned a salute from some one in the prison gateway, and we walked on past the warders’ houses, with their fresh white curtains, and windows filled with brilliant flowers, showing care and love for pretty things. ‘I cannot think,’ she said, glancing from the groups of children in the road to the women sewing in the doorways, ‘how mothers can bear their children to grow up here.’

I intended in my practical way, to ask her why, but just then I saw that the churchyard gate was open, and that distracted my thoughts. There was to be a funeral presently, the loiterers told us, so we passed in unhindered, and strolled round into the quietness behind the church; while Denis told us how it was built by twenty-eight convicts who had been brought up to no trade, and how the one who did most, if not all, of the really beautiful carving, stayed voluntarily three months beyond his time to finish, and now was earning a handsome income by



this power he had discovered in himself. We stood beside a gate in the further wall, and looked into a large quarry, smiling to think that chance had given us here the very opportunity which had been out of reach even of our boastful guide. Presently, while my eyes were fixed upon the distant grey figures, so little noticeable among the masses of grey stone, Mary called my attention to one man wheeling a barrow heavily along on the other side of our wall, a warder following close behind him.

‘What an evil face!’ she said, when he had passed. ‘He must have a pigtail hidden in that cap, Mr. Vesey; for surely he may well answer to the name of “Ah Sin.”’

‘Denis, what does that L mean on the blue badge on his sleeve?’ I asked.

‘That his sentence was for life, and below are his number and initials. The ticket being blue shows that he has served three years already.’

‘Three years—already!’ echoed Mary, with a quick catching of her breath, ‘You speak of three years as if it were a day, instead of—a lifetime! But’—with one of her sudden changes of tone, as she looked after the two men—‘I would rather be a convict than a warder.’

isn't it, who says, "Make Thy souls better, Lord
—or worse."'

'Denis,' I said, hurrying in my speech for fear of these words of Mary's hurting him as they hurt me, 'what is that whistle and command for?'

'For the men to fall in and be counted,' he told me, his grave, stern eyes turning neither to Mary nor me. 'Each warder counts the men under him once in fifteen minutes.'

I remember that after that we chatted together merrily, leaning on the wooden gate; indeed we grew even frivolous when, Denis having asked Mary to tell him what flowers she would wear that night, for him to send them to her, she plunged into a gravely ridiculous discussion as to what he would wear himself. I should at any time have been shy of beginning such a silly feminine topic before Denis, but to my astonishment he seemed quite interested. How strange it is that the same subject should be so different when uttered by two different people!

‘You have your sisters to consult, Barry,’ explained Mary, with droll solemnity. ‘Poor Mr. Vesey and I have to study the art of dress alone.’

‘You have no occasion to study it,’ said I, warmly, ‘and, luckily for them, men do not need. It makes so little difference in them.’

‘So little!’ she cried. ‘Why, Barry, even

“Hokee Pokee Crack-my-crown,
King of the Island of Gulp-em-down,
Was thought the finest young man about town
(*Only*) When drest in his best for a party!”’

‘I see that I must be dressed in my best for the party,’ announced Denis, laughing over her emphatic accent of the added word.

‘Yes, but can you do it unaided? He could not, for

“Hokee Pokee Ching-em-e-ring,
Nineteenth wife of this mighty King,
Loved her lord above everything,
And decked him out for the party!”’

‘Ah! then,’ said Denis, ‘I must wait until I have a wife who loves her lord above everything. Well, my comfort is that I’m a fellow whom nobody notices at any party, and might go decked with the broad arrow like the poor fellows there; while you——’


‘The writer writ ; I see. Do you write—cleverly?’ asked Mary, glancing at him with ludicrous inquiry.

‘No, indeed,’ he answered, his eyes warm and tender in their merriment ; while I worried myself whether it could be contact with the world which had taught Mary Keveene the trick of taking all things coldly, or whether it could really be, as I feared, that nothing ever could stir her save some hidden past.

‘I think,’ she said, carelessly, ‘there is no need for any of us to know more than just enough to talk about.’

‘Or is it better,’ he asked, ‘to know enough to think about?’

‘And best, you mean,’ she added, with a little laugh, ‘to know enough to write about? Perhaps so. It certainly makes a wonderful difference how things are written for us. For instance if Barbara and I read of a fight among those men we should shudder with horror ; but when we read of the knights whose good swords carved the casques of men, it is a little different,



isn't it, Barry? What? They fought in a good cause, you say? Who is to decide that? Not Mr. Vesey,' she added, audaciously, 'for I'm sure he knows more about these felons than about Tennyson's knights.'

'I know of one—and I understand him best —“who loved one only, and who clave to her.”'

I felt very silent, looking away among the busy, distant figures, but Mary answered him placidly.

'It must be very dull to love one only—always.'

'You cannot understand,' he said, in his earnest way. 'I cannot expect that you should. But even you may be some day glad to feel that you were one man's only love.'

'But why could not the model knight love one only, and *not* cleave to her?' inquired Mary, absurdly. 'That would have been more unselfish, and more comfortable for her.'

'Mary,' said Denis, uttering her name a little brokenly, 'will you remember some day how impossible it would be for me to love again—however hopeless my love is? And how through all my life now I must love one only, even if she——'


'Ah,' cried Mary, lightly interrupting, 'there

her gaze. The light swinging step of the man who came towards us in his white knickerbockers and dark blue stockings, carrying a pick upon his shoulders, and with the dark, watchful jailer following closely upon him, struck me instantly; and there came into my mind a sudden perception that there was something different from the other men in the way that this man even wore his cap. Then I remember mechanically trying to read the number on the blue ticket on his sleeve. But I got no further than the L. He had a lifetime of punishment to come, and so what matter that three years of it were over? How they had told upon him; for the face, though young, was terrible to look upon in its hopeless, haggard despair—I could gaze unembarrassed, for his eyes were fixed strangely and vaguely far away from us.

Involuntarily I turned with a questioning glance at Mary, though I cannot understand why, unless I hoped that she might acknowledge *this* face was not wholly evil. She stood

as she had done before, but now with her elbows resting on the gate, and one clenched hand on either temple. In the first second I thought she had fainted against the bar; in the next I knew this change in her was worse than any swoon. Her dark, dilated eyes were filled with terror; her breath came in hurried and irregular gasps; and her parted lips were colourless as the white forehead from which she had feverishly pushed the soft, dark hair. I do not know that I can tell what happened after that. I scarcely seem able to write how even the afternoon passed. My heart bled for Mary when I saw how bravely she kept the fact before her that we were her guests, and that to be bright, and watchful, and alert for us was simply her duty as hostess. Now and then I could not help fancying she looked at me wearily, as if she longed for a word of sympathy even from me, because I must have seen that sudden shock of hers; but the thought had vanished almost before I could understand it, and then again I felt certain she must be unaware of my having noticed her. I am ashamed to say I was glad to think this, and that Denis had felt so sure his words of love alone had wrought the sudden change in her. Still I knew that

I once, far on in the afternoon—for we had been long over the abundant, luxurious meal Mary Keveene had provided—found her standing alone, back in the shadow of the old castle built by our second Norman king, and seeming to have forgotten us all, as she stood gazing wistfully over the sea; her eyes, after their brilliant excitement, looking unutterably dark and sad in the white, uplifted face. I could not even myself understand the yearning there was in my heart to be near her then—I do not mean to be standing at her side, silent as she was in the soft, dreamy air; but to feel that her thoughts would touch me; that her heart would hold me; that my love was something to her. In my unskilful way, I did at last join her, but did not speak, because again she seemed to be so far apart from us. But she turned tranquilly to me as if I had summoned her by message, and asked me, in her gentle, careless way, if I had noticed the movement of that seaweed on the waves, was it not



beautiful? What could I say then? Nothing of this strange new yearning there was in my heart, and therefore I made no effort to say anything else, and presently we joined the others, just as if we had only turned aside for a moment to really look at the seaweed on the waves. I remember that when Uncle Steven and Denis joined us they were speaking of the convicts (in that spot it seemed such a natural topic to fall into!) and I looked at Mary, for she had rapidly silenced or changed any conversation that touched upon them. Uncle Steven was excusing the prisoners for bribing their warders when they could, and Denis, upholding his opposite idea, said it would help the great and needed reform, if they would feel themselves above it in a moral sense.

‘Pooh! pooh!’ said Uncle Steven. ‘After years of *this* life, I would not give twopence for any man’s morality.’

I saw Mary’s very lips blanch, yet a minute afterwards she was answering a jest of Archie’s with another. When we were separating to walk or explore, she and I were supposed to have had sufficient exercise all morning, and would have been left behind; but Mary seemed to have no idea of that, and attached herself to

parties had re-assembled, when she quietly joined me, as I rested against the broken arch of the old church which was once the centre of the island, but is now upon the edge of the cliff. There was no longer burning, brilliant sunshine, for the sky, so clear an hour ago, was overspread with gauzy clouds, and the water was more grey than blue.

‘You should have come with us, if only to see the hart’s tongue at Fern Cave.’

‘This is very pretty,’ I said, looking vaguely among the old tombstones.

‘Yes, but the prettiest bit of your view is spoiled by that railway they have made—I suppose in erecting the breakwater.’

I did so long to set my mind at ease, fearing she had been alone and unhappy, that at last I had the courage to question her.

‘Alone!’ she repeated. ‘How could I have been alone? You forget, my dear, that this is my picnic. I am only too proud to be among my guests.’

‘You could surely take a little solitude if you

choose,' I said, though made uncomfortable by her words.

'Why should I? Listen, Barry, with what great, heavy sighs the sea breaks upon the beach below? Do you ever notice how little mirth there is in any voice of Nature's?'

There came into my mind how I have read that the valleys laugh and sing, but somehow I could not say it. I would rather she should think Nature sad while she was sad herself, and so again I was silent; till she suddenly and gently took my hand and smiled—though a smile sadder to me than many tears. 'Come, Barbara, my model waiter has tea prepared for us. We must not be absent.'

'Yet,' I said, with a spasm of desire to break the ice between us, 'I—I wanted to speak to you, Mary—if I might.'

'Of course you do,' said Mary, with a most unnatural composure, 'and I too, my Barbara, want to speak to you—"Of many things; of shoes, of ships, of sealing-wax, of cabbages, and kings. Of why the sea is boiling hot, and whether pigs have wings." Varied subjects, of course, but suitable for a picnic, don't you think? Come; your uncle teased me and said, if he had organised the picnic, he should have ordered

watching her ; yet I think not once through the drive did she glance at me. She never looked save straight into the face of the person she addressed, or down upon the flowers in her lap, while her eyes shone so feverishly that even the long lashes could not veil their fire.

Well as I knew that I could never be of use or comfort to her, I hated the thought of leaving her, and perhaps she saw this in my face, when we stood separating after the drive—reminding each other we were to meet in our rooms presently for a dance and supper—for she asked me to go with her and stay while she dressed, promising that then she would come and help me to make up for lost time. I knew there was plenty of time, and was only too glad to be with her still—a strange feeling, considering that her reckless depreciation of her own suffering gave me positive pain. I think I had the fancy that alone with her, in her own room, it would be comparatively easy for me to show a little of the sympathy I felt so

keenly, yet could not express; but I soon found that was a great mistake of mine. It not only was not easy, but it was not even possible.

While her maid changed her dress, she talked to me exactly as if I had gone in with her for the one sole purpose of being amused, and even the young Irishwoman's gravity must have been sorely taxed.

‘Silla does not approve of this dress, Barbara,’ Silla's mistress said, lightly, as she looked meditatively on the whiteness of her arms against the pale salmon pink skirt; ‘though I'm sure she does not know what colour it really is.’

‘Not I, Miss Mary. P'raps 'tis drab, and p'raps 'tis red, but annyway 'tis brown.’

‘Selina had a long search for that shade,’ said I, laughing, ‘but failed in getting it.’

‘I bought it in Dublin months ago,’ said Mary, listlessly. ‘Your sister would look better in it than I: there's more of her than there is of me.’

‘Not a bit more,’ asserted Silla, with a sort of prompt unreasoning loyalty. ‘She may be taller and stouter, but there's not wan bit more of her, Miss Mary, me dear.’

Just then there was brought to Mary as beautiful a bouquet surely as Weymouth could

man quizzically.

‘Which shall I wear?’ she asked me; but I shook my head. This was a question I would not answer, though I was growing so much more sensible now about Denis.

So Mary turned, half laughingly, to Silla.

‘Which do you like best?’

‘I don’t like eether best, miss,’ said the maid, with honest impartiality. ‘I jest prefer them both equally the same.’

‘Then,’ said Mary, gravely, ‘I will wear the heath—only.’ And she did, but it was so hidden among the laces of her square cut bodice, that I felt sure Denis would not see it.

‘Are you cold, Mary?’ I asked, seeing that her face was as white as the soft white cloak that Silla wrapped about her; but she shook her head, took her long mittens in her hand, and we started off together, while everything was clear and beautiful in the still evening air, and even the grim island where this morning Mary had met such a strange and tragic shock, looked picturesque in the twilight hush and calm.

‘Barbara’—we had walked silently, Mary’s eyes still on the island—‘I remember we did not think the same to-day. Do you recollect what Mr. Vesey said about men of refinement, and of good birth and education, herding with those hopeless, hardened fiends? I said they all deserved it; I suppose they do, but I—wish I had not said it. I wonder how long hearts take to break.’

Yes, I knew how differently she had treated this before, and how I had wondered a little over it, but I only looked round silently into her face.

‘What is the matter?’ she asked, abruptly. ‘You would say you were not surprised, because I am hard on everyone. Yes, so I am. How cold it is!’

I knew it was not the fresh evening air which had made her shiver, or brought that little catch into her voice; but, acting on instinct, I pretended that I, too, thought it cold, and begged her to go back and put on the fur cloak carried by her maid who followed us far behind; saying that I would saunter on very slowly. The trifling ruse succeeded, for when I let her overtake me she was just as she had been in her own rooms.

dance with Denis, and yet the pleasure of that was a little marred ; for when, by what he said to me, I was assured beyond all doubt that he had laid the sudden change in Mary to anger against him for so unmistakably telling her there, and in my presence, that he loved her, I —though I thought I should be relieved by this assurance—suddenly awoke to the conviction that I wished he had discovered the truth. I felt then that it would relieve me of a ridiculous weight of anxiety if Denis knew, for he—so wise and thoughtful—might advise her, if not help her.

Wednesday, July 27th, 1881.

Since Friday—the day of Mary's picnic to Portland Island—she has, I think, avoided us as much as she possibly could without making the fact too patent. Once at our dance, when she was sitting at mother's side, mother did question her inquisitively on her past, as if to seek some solution there for her odd, unconventional be-

haviour, and, though there was nothing marked in her reception of this scrutiny, I thought that in her manner afterwards there was an added solitariness and coldness. To-day I felt I could bear this isolation of hers no longer, and so I went to seek her, feeling quite sure she would be within doors on such a showery morning. Between the showers, I ran into the hotel and up to her room, but she was not there. The Irish maid came in at my summons, and stood looking out upon the wet scene with a sort of glum disapproval.

‘No, Miss Oswell, Miss Mary’s nawt in,’ she said, in answer to my query. ‘Even these down-powers don’t bring her in loike they bring everybody else. Jest you see!’ A sudden scud of rain had sent all who had ventured out flying into the houses, and the esplanade was deserted, save by a man who stood patiently covering his tray of sweets with yellow tarpaulin. In a few minutes the rain ceased, and the man displayed his merchandise as patiently as he had covered it, while the people gathered again, though not in the hurried manner in which they had dispersed.

‘Oh, it will not hurt Miss Keveene,’ I said, as the sky grew silvery bright along the horizon.

hours already. She's alwis there. She took me yesterday'—rather vengefully,—'an' a noice day we had; walkin', walkin', walkin', till I was killed alive. Then talkin' to the wickedest-lookin' people, an' to women we'd niver so much as seen before; an' wance Miss Mary givin' money slyly to a man that looked loike a p'liceman—in Oirland, not a p'liceman here, miss—an' givin' cakes to children; an' us havin' meals up in a sheer little room without ever a carpet; an' gettin' mean little scimpy flowers, an' pretendin' she goes for *them*; an' makin' me carry ferny things, as if we thought nothin' of anythin' but goin' to that stony place to see ferns an' sich. An' you believe me, Miss Oswell, she went to one cabin an' asked if they'd lodgin's to let; an' so p'raps to-morrow she'll jest say, "Put up some clo's, Silla, we're going to live in Portland." Glory me! I'd be 'shamed to own I'd trod such a ne'er-do-well place. Oh, she's fit for even that, is Miss Mary, if the mood's upon her——'

‘Is not it growing fine, Silla?’ I put in, not because the sun was shining, but because I could not listen to more.

‘Sure it isn’t rainin,’ allowed Silla, grudgingly; ‘but the wither keeps on jest the same.’

To hide my smile I leaned from the open window, and, doing so, I saw Mary and Denis Vesey walking slowly, side by side, towards the hotel, but in evident silence. I intended to wait there till I caught Mary’s eye; but, when I saw her gazing coldly and absently straight before her, I looked at Denis, and in a moment I read in his face enough to tell me he had had a cruel blow. I drew in hurriedly, wishing myself anywhere but where I was; for, though I felt so much for Denis, I knew there was greater suffering on Mary’s pale, still face, and that, as soon as she came to me, I should forget all sorrow but hers—so weak-minded am I!

‘The clouds are breaking over the head, Barbara,’ she said, as she came in, just as if she had been away from me for a few moments merely to study the weather. ‘How strange that glare of sunshine looks on such a heavy, swelling sea, while all between us and that beautiful splash of silver is unbroken cloud! It is a scene of—memory.’

'twill be done.'

'Barbara,' said Mary, turning to me with an odd little catch in her breath, when the maid had left us, 'have you wondered where I have been to-day—and lately? I have been over the old ground you and I trod together so—ignorantly last Friday morning; over it again, and again, and again. I wondered that day, Barry, why you wished to know so much. Do you remember? Afterwards I wished to know it too, and—more. But I—cannot learn.'

'You should not have gone alone, Mary,' I put in, weakly, wondering how much or how little she wished me to comprehend.

'What is it to me to be alone?' she asked, with a laugh that was utterly sorrowful. 'Who cares that I am alone?'

'I do.'

'You?' she said, and bent suddenly to me with a swift, sweet kiss. 'You are nearly always alone yourself; you are a good preacher, therefore, my Barbara.'

‘Then Denis was not with you all the time?’ I asked, impelled by a sudden impulse to woo her confidence.

‘No,’ she said, speaking slowly; yet even I could detect that it was an effort to her to keep her voice quite calm. ‘He joined me only a little time ago. It is the last time he will ever do so.’

I understood, of course, what she meant to tell me; yet, though Denis was a friend of long, long years—the very truest, dearest friend whom I had ever had—and though I knew she had given him the greatest sorrow of his life, I was more sorry for her, as she stood there before me so still and grave, and incomprehensible to me. I thought I could understand Denis Vesey’s sorrow, but hers I could not.

‘What was I telling you?’ she went on, presently, as if stifling a sigh that would have passed her tremulous lips. ‘I have learnt all I can there, it is but a little to help me, and now I am going to London, Barbara.’

‘To London?’ I echoed, in simple astonishment. ‘Alone?’

‘Yes; why not? You forget’—gently—‘that I am not used to being with a mother, as you are.’

and just said, very softly, 'Yes,' with no surprise, or thanks, or comment; and yet the word said so much! More than a kiss. Then the one drawback to this plan came into my mind. 'But, Mary,' I said, unwillingly, 'I fear I must be an expense to you.'

'An expense!' she echoed, with a real smile in her eyes; though, before it had stirred her lips, it had vanished. 'No, not an expense, but a comfort, Barbara;' and then, like the simpleton I am, I went away to hide my tears; for I have so longed to be a comfort to her!

To-night, before we separated in the gardens, Mary held my hand for a few moments (she looks so different dressed in brown, as she has been ever since Friday, with a little demure brown bonnet tied under her chin, though quite as beautiful to me) and asked me whether it had been difficult for me to win permission to go with her.

'Not at all,' I told her, and did not add that my sisters seemed not sorry she was going, and of course could spare me to her very well.

‘Then we will leave to-morrow morning.’

‘To-morrow?’

‘Yes, to-morrow, please.’

As I went in alone, a few stars looking tenderly out of the blue above, I pondered this, and whether Denis would seek Mary there; for I had not seen him since I had caught that glimpse of his troubled face in the morning. and I guessed he had left Weymouth, and was perhaps in London now.

Friday, July 29th, 1881. Morley’s Hotel.

We arrived here yesterday, and to-day Mary has been prosecuting the quest which brought her to town. She had told me that in a coffee house in the Strand copies of the *Times* were kept filed, and that she wished to read them, so we went there at once this morning; her step shrinking as she turned into the building, which was strange to her, though her great dark eyes were fearless in their excitement. I especially wish not to be intrusive, and so did not go in with her, but beyond that I have a nameless fear of seeing her make the discovery which still I know she wishes to make. So, though uncomfortable at leaving her, I walked on, backwards and forwards, at first taking quite long

any ordinary occasion it would have been my chief aim to shun as a haunt, until a young man, with his face wreathed in smiles, asked me significantly whether he should 'go in and fetch 'im out.' This caused me an acceleration of heat by no means needed on this July day, and at once I turned into the house, glad of even such a privacy. A man who met me at the top of the stairs demanded a penny; then I entered a room he pointed to, where Mary was bending over a table on which a great folio of newspapers lay open. For some time she did not seem to see me, but I found a chair, and so I did not mind. At last she raised a pair of feverish eyes from the open pages, and looked dazedly at me, as if—yet not as if—she had expected me to be there.

'Barbara,' she said, 'I have learned—some of it, and can remember; but—come here and write this for me, will you? *Mr. Poland and Mr. Montagu Williams prosecuted*—Mr. Poland and Mr. Montagu Williams—do you understand?

Now, look. You see the name of the barrister who defended? Copy that, please. He is very clever, very well known. We have both heard of him. But you see there was another, too. You see? Mr. Henry. He is supposed to be a very promising young barrister, for I met him lately in Dublin. I know where he is to be found, for he told me a curious tale of his—rooms.’

‘Yes,’ I said, stupidly, in her eager pause.

‘So—through those two—they called it manslaughter, and I must learn from one of—Now, Barbara,—her feverish gaze once more upon the paper—‘write this: *The prisoner was charged with the murder, on June 27th, 1878, of George Haslam, of Rocklands, Devonshire, to which he pleaded not guilty. Not guilty.* Barbara, have you written it?’

‘Yes,’ said I, my hand shaking over the task, as she spoke in such a low, impetuous way.

‘Write again—here it is. *On being called upon for his defence, he only said, addressing the jury, that he should be glad to have his suspense terminated, and know the worst.* Write that, for I cannot remember—some words. They—go from me. Here—here.’ Her white fingers turning the leaves, and going steadily down another

Write it, Barbara. It will—remind me. That is all. I can remember the rest. Thank you, Barbara.'

And then, the bright excitement still in her eyes, but her manner suddenly quite calm, she spoke of other things, and said no more of this to me, while we walked as swiftly as we could along the Strand.

'I hope,' she said, her gentle tones sounding unutterably sorrowful to me after their late excitement, 'you are not like Rogers, Barry, and look upon the London streets as the graves of memory.'

I shook my head with a smile, for there was no need to tell Mary that, though I have Rogers' 'Italy' at home, beautifully bound, I did not know he had ever made that dismal little observation.

In the shadow of St. Clement's Church, Mary turned me aside to a paved court, the existence of which I should never have guessed, if left to myself. Behind the gates which kept it from

the vulgar tread, a forgotten-looking man sat reading, and, though he was at first conscientiously unwilling to let us pass into the mystic region beyond him, he gravely let us in when Mary told him whom we sought. I think we both stepped softly, for there not only was a great hush in the narrow court, across which the two high masses of building seemed about to meet—but such a feeling of solitude that we might have left the noise and bustle of the Strand a hundred miles behind us. Throughout the length and breadth of the place (though the breadth was scarce worth mentioning) there was no one to be seen save a morbid child, who stood against the iron gate, staring up at two small cages, in one of which a blackbird fluttered restlessly in the heat with an evident headache, while in the other, watching him with anxious solicitude, a tiny canary sang cheerily as an encouragement. In her gentle way, Mary spoke to the child, who told us, with no smile, and without dropping her eyes from the birds, that she came every day ‘out of the noise to listen.’

I looked furtively about me as we passed on, half expecting to be myself absorbed into the silent buildings. In one corner of the court a

dows all seemed standing open in a flame of red geraniums.

In the shadowy room to which we were led, there sat a young man who recognised Mary in an instant. He had a high, narrow forehead, and did not look to me at all clever; but as Mary said he was, and I am no judge at all, of course he was. I sat down at the open window, thinking Mary would rather I were not near her, though she had asked me to go with her; but she gave me a smile before she began to speak, and I quite understood that it was meant to assure me she had no wish that I were not present. I heard her ask this gentleman if he had not defended in a certain trial, and when he acknowledged having done so, as a junior, she begged him to answer her a few questions. I did not hear all she said, I tried not to, but I heard him tell her it was through a friend, to whom the defence would have been entrusted had he not been just then leaving for India; 'a very clear-sighted and popular barrister, who was so convinced that there were ex-

tenuating circumstances to be discovered that he would have gladly undertaken the case had it been possible. The circumstances were not eventually proved to be what he hoped, but still it was brought in manslaughter, which was '— after a pause—' something.'

I liked the man because he never smiled. I could not have borne him to do so, with Mary's anxious face before him.

'I being young in the profession,' he went on, 'and I hope conscientious, this friend named me for the defence, and strongly impressed me with his own belief in there being a possible solution to the mystery other than appeared upon the surface; but I regret to say this hope was not realised. He instructed me himself, quite apart from the solicitor's instructions, before he left; and we have often since talked over all the circumstances, he being still interested in them, and always a kind friend to the boy who now holds the property. This friend is coming in a few minutes to keep an appointment with me, and if you will wait, Miss Keveene, he will tell you more than I can concerning that part of the tragedy of which you wish to hear.'

So we sat waiting, I still looking out against

with a few words of apology. In a few seconds he re-opened the door, saying,

‘This is the friend of whom I have been speaking, Miss Keveene. I have not prepared him, lest I should detain you. He will set your mind at rest on any point. Miss Keveene, Mr. Vesey.’

‘He will set your mind at rest on any point!’

How the words haunted me as I watched Denis meet the girl he loved; for whom, as I saw instantly by the sudden haughty stillness of her face, he could do nothing.

‘May I *not* help you?’ he asked, in a quiet, anxious way, seeing the change in her.

‘You cannot,’ she answered, with a coldness so intense that I wondered how I could ever have called her cold before that moment.

Still, in his manly forbearance, he asked again,

‘Let me do what I can to help you, Miss Keveene. What may I do?’

‘Nothing,’ she answered, icily, and had risen now and was looking towards me, though I fancied she did not even see me.

‘Let me send Henry back to you, then,’ he pursued, patiently. ‘You would have questioned him but for his foisting me upon you. Let him help you if I may not.’

‘I do not wish to question him now,’ said Mary, her voice quick and petulant and childish as I had never heard it before. ‘I was curious and ridiculous over a matter I had—read of; that was all. Will you come now, please, Barbara?’

I had risen before, expecting this summons from the moment when I had seen the effect upon her of Mr. Vesey’s entrance, but he stood before her, one hand extended in unconscious fervour.

‘If I can help you—not now alone, Mary,’—he scarcely seemed to know he was addressing her so, in his great earnestness—‘but at any time, I will do it. You believe me?’ His simple word was like an oath to him, and even for her to doubt him at that moment would have been impossible.

‘I do not understand,’ she said, a terribly dazed look gathering in her eyes, as they seemed to grow darker and darker in her white face. ‘Why should you feel that I need your help—or any man’s? There is nothing for anyone to do for me.’

compassion, as she stood with his gaze upon her; her tearless eyes filled with misery, the breath coming silently, yet almost sobbingly, from her parted lips. Hand in hand we went to the door, but then I turned to Denis, who stood just where he had stepped back, and with the same awakening look. I could not help it. When Mary and I passed through the door, I turned suddenly, as if I had forgotten something, and went up to him for a moment.

‘Denis,’ I whispered, ‘I am with her, and I will let you know if she needs help.’

‘Needs help,’ he answered. ‘She needs it indeed—God’s help as well as man’s. I remember now where and when I have seen her. It has puzzled me so often: but I remembered all when I saw again that tearless misery in her eyes, and that confused, bewildered pause. Don’t forsake her. Go back and be a friend to her, dear Barbara.’

For a few moments I felt as if I were in a dream, even after rejoining Mary—it had taken

so few moments after all!—but presently, by a great effort, I could speak naturally to her. Indeed this day I surprised myself for the first time in my life by my assumed ease.

‘I believe,’ I said, considering that I adroitly changed the current of Mary’s thoughts, ‘it is five hours since we breakfasted.’

‘Is not that strange!’ said Mary, pointing to a board which I should never have noticed, whereon it said, *Into this inn no burdens are admitted, and no cries allowed.* ‘If it were true that no burdens are admitted, Barbara, I could not have entered.’

‘And if it were true that no cries are allowed,’ I added, fancying I skilfully pursued my plan of arousing her, ‘I should not either, for it fills my eyes with tears to see that aged child still here.’

‘I see,’ said Mary, softly. ‘Stop, Barbara, and let us try to bring one child-like smile to the solemn face of this little creature who comes each day out of the world’s din “to listen.”’

We walked for quite half an hour in silence, and even swiftly, though the pavement was so often crowded; then Mary suddenly stopped, and broke her long, sad silence.

‘Oh, Barbara, how selfish I am! And we are not even on the way to our hotel,’—in some

tite we had for our return.

‘Then come,’ she said, and we went into a restaurant close beside us. Mary gave the modest order to an imposing lady with many golden curls and plaits, but I saw how absently she must have done so—she so always keen and observant!—when I found her quite insensible to the injured manner in which this lady haughtily transmitted the order to a ‘Geo-arge’ in the background. I knew by her tone we must have offended her, and I sought guiltily for a cause. In the window there was the legend ‘Tea and coffee always ready;’ then our request could scarcely have been a shock to her. I tried to feel at ease again, while ‘Geo-arge’ kept us waiting, and, as Mary did not speak to me, I was obliged to study our surroundings. Then I became aware of the injury we had done to the golden-haired siren. On our entrance I had noticed a stout, merry-looking gentleman in clerical attire seated at the counter, and apparently half way through a cup of coffee and a

proposal of marriage; now he had turned his attention entirely to us—at least to Mary—and had evidently forgotten both his coffee and his enchantress. The look he gave Mary—who sat so quietly in her brown dress, utterly unaware of it—was a look of genuine involuntary interest; so frankly compassionate, as well as inquisitive, that it actually made me smile, not with any feeling of mirth, but with a quiet gladness that men could be so sympathetic. Shall I see the honest, kindly face ever again?

I was so gravely pondering this, even after the clergyman had left, that when Mary spoke I started.

‘Barbara, are you sorry you came with me?’

‘No; very glad,’ I said, in my blunt way.

‘It is soon over; but, selfish as I am, I can be glad that you will be among your own people to-morrow.’

‘And you?’ I asked, timidly.

‘I have something to do. I have work that will take me away. First to——’

‘Yes, Mary?’ interrogatively, when she paused.

‘First to Devonshire.’

‘And I—may I not come?’

Again she gave that long wistful look into my

you go, my Barbara.'

So I instantly decided not to leave her. She had borrowed a railway guide from 'Geo-arge,' and seemed to be studying it in quite a leisurely manner, when suddenly she closed it, and rose, looking at me with feverish eagerness.

'Barbara, there is a fast train from Waterloo at 2.20. Will you come? Can we do it?

'Oh yes,' I said, but only mechanically, for in her silence I had fallen into the mental composition of a letter to mother—it being a habit of mine to concoct in my head first the few letters I write.

We took a hansom back to Morley's, packed our bags, and then, while Mary was settling the bill, I wrote and sent three telegrams; one to mother from myself; one from Mary to her maid directing her to bring luggage for us both and take the train from Weymouth to Westercombe, going to the hotel which our waiter told us was *the* hotel of Westercombe, and there await us; and one to the hotel to secure rooms, but not to

bespeak a private sitting room, as Mary said she hoped we should to-morrow go on to Rocklands. We drove fast to Waterloo, without stopping for lunch; but taking a man with us who would secure seats and summon us at the last minute before the train left; for only on this condition would Mary run the risk of waiting for any refreshment before our journey.

There seemed very little vacant space left in the train as we made our way to where the man stood on guard at our carriage door, but our compartment was not full. A black-hooded sister sat in a reverie in the corner opposite me, and a fashionable young mother occupied the corner opposite Mary, while her child was temporarily settled near me. I had taken care to provide books and papers for the journey, for I knew that to Mary they would be a cloak for silence, and that it would rest her to be silent; and at once I took a book and buried myself in it, to show Mary that there was no expectation on my part of conversation on hers. But as the child near me took occasion to slip off the seat about once in every two miles, and her mother was languidly engrossed in observation of Mary, I had occupation enough in picking her up.

The train sped through the summer landscape,

but, in spite of the long lashes lying so still on the white cheeks, I knew Mary never slept, and understood the nervously suppressed excitement which made her so still. The gentle Sister opposite me dreamed on, with a sweet and patient indifference to us all; and my occupation continued unabated, though now there was less hope of an abiding result each time I replaced the child upon a seat. But when we reached Salisbury, and, having five or six minutes to stay, walked on the platform for a change, I knew how conscious Mary had been of us all. In just her usual way she jested me about the child, and then spoke with a sigh of the Sister of Charity.

‘What were her musings, Barbara? What dreams could make a face so patient? Was she back in a world that had once enthralled her, or very, very far away from it?’

‘I think she was warm,’ said I, placidly. ‘Her costume is very heavy for this weather.’

We found our companions still in the carriage, and had, therefore, the same occupations all the

way to Exeter, where they left us. During the ten minutes we stayed at Queen Street Station we had tea, knowing we should not reach Westercombe until after nine ; then we went on, still to all appearance reading and resting.

I remembered having heard much of the beauty of Westercombe from Denis, and told Mary so, when we left the train and saw that quite a cluster of tourists had alighted with us on the platform of this terminus ; but Mary only answered listlessly that she had always heard it was a very favourite seaside resort.

A private omnibus took us down to the large hotel on its wide plateau among the cliffs, and there we supped together in a window of the coffee-room, thinking more of the sweet, dim view of sea and rocks, which we begged not to have shut out, than of the scene within. From the foreign waiter who attended on us, Mary learnt that a coach left Westercombe for Rocklands daily during the height of the season, while it only went twice a week earlier and later. He told us he thought that by sending up to the coach office early he could secure us the box seats, as, of course, we wished to thoroughly enjoy the scenery, did we not ? Mary told him that we did, and he cheerfully

resort to, I will sleep now, that I may be fully rested against to-morrow.

Saturday, July 30th.

Our waiter seemed to consider that his success in having got us the seats he advised, gave him a special right over Mary, and he came out of his dignity to replace the ladder (quite unnecessarily) before he allowed her to climb to her seat. Many of the tourists and holiday-makers, who had filled the breakfast-tables in the coffee-room, had dispersed now, with rod and line, or sketch-book, or knapsack; but the coach was filled too, and some stood watching the start from the wide gravel sweep before the hotel—a start which I must own the vehicle accomplished with great *éclat*, its horn blowing a challenge to any other coach to show such a goodly cargo, or a team more ardently resolved on doing its duty that day.

Certainly the dust swept over us—as well as round and round us—rather often, settling in

every cranny, and only dumbly laughing, I suspect, to see us bend our heads and think we could thus elude its writhing embrace, and certainly by noon the sun beat fiercely down upon us; but yet it was a glad, delightful drive. Now and then, with a very babel of tongues behind us, we rolled along the level road with its grass borders and fringe of waving beech, through which the summer sky was outlined by the heights of Exmoor, while our driver pointed vaguely with his whip, telling us all that that low wall encircled the great moor, breaking off to call to the brisk little lad who acted as our guard that Lorna had a stone in her shoe. A halt while the boy took the stone from Lorna, who stood as quietly as if she had not known she could have trodden the child to death in half a minute, sharp as he was; and a dash down hill between high hedgerows, all their primness melted into beauty by the wanton, sweet embrace of loveliest wild blossoms. Then smoothly stealing up the Devon hills, the four brown horses pulling against each other generously, and the boy behind blowing lusty, unmelodious blasts upon his horn, as if beyond this hill a city lay expecting us and listening for this token. On under the bordering tassels of the woods,

sounds.

Alarming shouts from our driver to a cumbersome sheep lying helplessly upon its back in the pasture, and—they being unavailing—the dropping, without any slackening of the horses' speed, of our lively little guard, who climbs the hedge, races across the meadow, sets the sheep upon his legs, and joins us, with honour, later on; where Lorna and her brothers slake their thirst at last, and where a crowd of children surround the coach, holding baskets of flowers above their heads, dumbly persistent until all of us, who will, have taken a little bunch of cottage flowers and dropped a penny in exchange. On again, the horn blown shrilly, until we stop before a tiny cottage down a steep incline of vegetable garden, and our genial coachman lifts his cheery voice for the benefit of its inhabitants:

‘Come, Mary, have you got your mother’s dinner ready? Here she is!’

Hastily a smiling, grey-haired woman comes from the doorway, and runs up the garden path,

wiping her hands upon her apron, an embodiment of the heartiest welcome I ever saw. Not one of us, clustered on the sunny roof of the coach, had ever supposed any human being was entombed in the solid body of the vehicle below us, until this merry woman opens the coach-door and rescues a very old woman, kisses her warmly on the steps, laughs her thanks and farewell, not only to the coachman, but to us all, and leads her mother indoors, her cheery voice following us upon our way.

Again and again, as we seemed to be nearing our destination, Mary led the coachman to speak of the neighbourhood ; but always her courage seemed to fail before she could ask any special question, until, after a marvellous blare, like a final explosion of the horn, we rolled majestically, and, as it were, with all our colours flying, up an abrupt ascent, and, with ineffable grace and elegance, were wheeled round, and stood, observed of all observers, before the great hotel upon the height at Rocklands. I looked to see the steps arranged for our descent, but they not only remained propped against the wall, but the ostler rested against them, contemplating us as he might a picture. Presently the reason of this was made clear to me, for we were requested

tude, the whip resting on his knee, and an affectionate gaze fixed upon the leaders' heads, while the nimble little guard stood comically upright, a pillar of strength, with the horn fixed mutely to his lips.

It was when this operation was to all appearance satisfactorily concluded, that Mary—evidently intending to linger until the other passengers had descended—summoned courage at last to question the coachman as she wished; only myself, of course, being able to detect the tremulous hesitancy in her voice.

‘Do you know Rocklands well?’

Very well, he told her. All Westercombe people knew Rocklands. It was beautiful up the river, though all the passengers would be sure to stay about the cliffs and sands. The river road was the prettiest walk or drive about.

‘Thank you, we will go,’ said Mary, gently acquiescent in his natural interpretation of her question. ‘It is a village then? I thought I

had heard of Rocklands as a house only, belonging to—to a Mr. Discombe, I think.’

Oh, she meant the Manor, of course, then? That was nearly a couple of miles beyond the village, higher up the river. Yes, that was a pretty place too—quite worth seeing.

‘Thank you,’ said Mary again. ‘Who owns it now?’

Young Mr. Discombe, she was told, a little less deliberately now that the coach was discharging its freight. He was a lad at Eton, and the place was to be let if anyone could be got to take it.

‘Was it then—had it a bad name?’

There were some, he said, who could not forget there had been a murder done there; but he thought it great folly, for it was not at the house at all.’

‘No,’ put in Mary, breathlessly; and I involuntarily took her hand in mine as we rose; ‘it was in a summer house; a little tower called the Belvidere.’

She was right, the man said, giving it as his opinion that people were foolish who shunned the house itself because of that; and that we might go and see the place if we liked walking, and be back to the hotel for lunch: then

entrance, walking in silence for a good while until I felt that I must break it, if only just to say what a pleasant drive we had had.

‘And yet,’ said Mary, absently, ‘two ridiculous lines were all the time running in my head,


“ Behind the postillion,
Sits care on a pillion.”

Was it not absurd, when we were such a merry party? How beautiful it is here, Barbara, and how—restful. That cow lying on the shady hillside, and placidly chewing the cud, is a perfect symbol of rest, I think.’

‘And the same spirit of rest,’ said I—I am afraid, only making talk—‘seems to animate everything.’

‘Or rather *not* animate,’ said Mary, smiling. ‘The very silence is music, and don’t you often feel that the country air upon your lips is Heaven’s pure benediction?’

‘You may imagine I have not much chance,’ said I, looking from her uplifted face far off to where the meadows gently rose to meet the



sky. 'The only bit of country easily obtainable at home is a hundred yards of the Duke's prim avenue at Chiswick.'

'But you have country within reach, Barry, surely, and woods! Can you have lived always away from the woods? They were my blessing. Oh, how I have wandered among them in the beautiful, thoughtful autumn weather, and found there——'

A sudden silence fell upon her then, and her gaze went away from me and grew absorbed, for I think she somehow knew that we were nearing the house she sought.

We had reached the river now, and down upon our left, between the steep and rugged banks, it rushed and sang and tossed along its stony bed; smoothly, yet in a wild excitement too; noisily, yet with softest sound to us; while on our right the summer woods bent over, sheltering our way, and giving us, in softest whispers, hints of the wonderful secrets that they held within their depths.

Presently the wood narrowed to a belt of trees, and we came upon a straight wide avenue, an old Tudor manor-house standing at its further end, with windows closed and shuttered jealously.

is—or was—a lovely place to live in, and it has never had other lords than the Discombes. I—have heard of it,’ answering my involuntary questioning glance. ‘And that is the Belvedere, that square tower against the sky on the other side of the river. I know that, too. It is on the highest point of the heath, isn’t it? It must—must look sheer down upon the river on one side.’

‘Oh yes,’ said I, ambiguously, for her words were as hurried as her step, while she led me on from the padlocked gates. ‘We can reach it from here, if we cross that little wooden bridge. There is no edge or wall, and we can climb straight up, with only a little difficulty.’

‘But there is a regular path,’ said Mary. ‘It will be further on, and a bridge and house near. I shall recognise that, too. I have read it all, you know; and the woman’s name—I remember. But still we can go this way, Barry, as you discovered it.’

I followed her down the steep bank, wonder-

ing over her free, fearless step, and crossed what I had called a bridge, which was but a long, narrow plank laid across the stream. Then we climbed—I all out of breath from the unaccustomed exercise, but Mary, breathing unhurriedly as if the hills had been her birthplace—to the tower standing on the bald crown of the height which on three sides sloped downwards smoothly to the meadows and the woods, but on the fourth fell roughly and jaggedly far down to the river's brim. Even to me there was a weird and eerie loneliness about the spot; which even the view, so wide and beautiful, could not dispel; but to Mary I could see that there was far more than that. She tried the door eagerly, then the one small window level with it, but both were fast. Then she stepped back, and examined the windows above. There were three, all as firmly closed as the one below; the paint blistered, and cobwebs lurking in the corners. We could just see that, outside the one overlooking the river, there was a feeble wooden balcony, which might once have been a rustic adornment, but now added to the desolate look of the place, for its rail had been roughly broken and left unrepaired.

‘What a forsaken spot!’ said I, involuntarily.

bent back, listening—‘there are steps within, and voices. What can it be?’

‘The wind,’ said I, laying my prosiness like a quieting touch upon her nervous excitement. ‘In such confinement, and on such a height, his voice makes all sorts of deceptive sounds. Listen to that faint, unearthly moaning! Come away, do.’


‘But we must go in,’ said Mary, with an anxious glance at me. ‘Shall you be afraid?’

I might have smiled, of course, but could not, with those lovely, serious eyes upon me.

‘Oh, to go in is different,’ I said, remembering I only wished to cheer her. ‘There will be no ghostly sounds within. We shall open the doors to the wind, and he will laugh instead of wail. But how are we to compass this entrance, Mary?’

‘That one before us will be the orthodox road,’ she said, in a new tone, as if she shook off some oppressive thought. ‘That will lead us to the bridge and to the house.’

We found it readily, a pleasant-looking little



white house, with green shutters, which the sweet Devon roses, climbing about them, made quite useless. After only a moment's hesitation, we went through the green gate, along a gravelled walk—bordered so lavishly with snowy pinks among the gold and brown nasturtiums that their perfume filled the air—and knocked upon a green door. Before our knock was answered, a tall, dark woman came round from the side of the house, and told us she had seen us coming, but had been busy with her bees—putting them new caps, I think she said—and ‘hadn't liked to leave 'em, for she'd had but poor speed with 'em so far.’

‘Is this the Ladyhouse?’ asked Mary, in her pretty, gentle way; ‘and are you Miss Angelona Brock? I thought so,’ as Miss Brock nodded, and stood expectant. ‘Then have you not the key of the Belvidere, and could we not enter it?’

‘Well, I have the key,’ allowed Miss Brock, reflectively, with shrewd, small eyes fixed on Mary's lovely face, ‘and I would take—a lodger of my own, say; but 'tis not public.’

‘Oh no,’ said Mary, very humble in her anxiety, but alert as ever, ‘and perhaps we have no right to ask; but I had read of it. We

There is the only genteel house about here. Rocklands is sure to be full this time of year, an' 'tis purtier too up the river here, so most do think. My one parlour's let, but the other do happen to be void, though 'tis not usual, for we've tourers here so continual, and gentlemen after trout. Yes, I've the key of the Belvidere,' she added presently, going more cheerfully back to the subject after we had been shown into the 'void' parlour, and had had a discussion on terms, which pleased her, though Mary made it very brief, 'and I may lend it to my lodgers, but 'tis so rusty now that I must get something done to it before 'twill open any door. That'll take up a day. Dear me, I was never asked before—no, I b'lieve—to show the inside of the Belvidere since the p'lice shut it up. It is zackly as it was then, but Mr. Ernest will have it all changed or taken down. It has a whisht name, you see, an' folks do have a horror of it, an' scarce ever go even near.'

'Will you tell us why?' asked Mary. 'Do you know the story?'

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‘Who better?’ inquired Miss Angerona. ‘This is the direct way to the Belvidere, an’ I kept the key then. There isn’t anyone knows it as well as I do belong to, sure-ly, an’ I’ll tell it, if you do want to hear it.’

And she did ; but, as it is impossible for me to give it in her Cornish way, I will merely write the little outlined story as it rests to-night in my memory. Miss Brock’s father, a Cornish boatman, had once saved the life of the lady the late Mr. Discombe had married for his second wife, and out of gratitude to him she had, after his death, sent for Angerona here, furnished for her this house, which she had persuaded Mr. Discombe to settle upon her for life, and so enabled her to make a comfortable living.

‘I always kept one key of the Belvidere,’ she said, ‘because Mrs. Discombe was forgetful, and, as she had to pass the Ladyhouse to reach the Belvidere, she could be sure of it from here ; and I went on keeping the key after she died. That was when Mr. Evlyn, the heir, was seventeen, and her own son, Mr. Ernest, seven years old ; he’s the squire now, and owns all the property, though he’s at Eton and wants to let the place. The squire changed a good deal after that ; p’raps it was, and p’raps it wasn’t, be-

gradually, in a slow, mean way, for the squire wasn't himself, and we suppose it was then he made his new will, and left Mr. Ernest the place. At last one day—it must be just six years ago—there was a quarrel, and I s'pose the squire took Mr. Haslam's side; that shows how changed he is, for he used to be bound up in Mr. Evlyn; but he did, and Mr. Evlyn went away. He had his own mother's money, and, though it wasn't anything like what he'd a right to inherit, it was enough for him to live on, and he dropped all names but his mother's, so I b'lieve, and we knew nothing of him for three years. Then squire fell ill, and 'twas said he sent and sent for his son, and that Mr. Haslam stopped the messages, and though we shall never know the truth of that, everybody up at the Manor said it was true; especially when Mr. Evlyn came so quickly and lovingly at last, because Parson himself had traced and summoned him. But, for all his eagerness then, he came too late.'

Here Miss Brock broke off to ask me, in a loud aside, whether my friend was faint; but I

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said feebly that the perfume of the pinks was rather oppressive through the open window; and while I closed it, and Mary leaned her head against it, I touched her cheek a moment with my lips.

‘Yes, he came too late, unfortunately,’ resumed Miss Brock. ‘The squire had had a terrible stroke, and was speechless and unconscious; as dead as any living man could be. There was no quarrel then between his son and Mr. Haslam; it was too sad a time to Mr. Evlyn for him to mind that man. Yet everyone could tell afterwards—and many of them were made to tell in the court—how Mr. Evlyn treated him as if he was invisible to the eye or ear; never spoke to him or of him; never moved aside for him if they met—once even throwing him coolly down and walking over him, yet never even then seeming to see or hear him. That was in the spring of ’78, and squire lingered days and weeks, scarce alive at all, and Mr. Haslam stayed at the Manor, as well as Mr. Evlyn. Mr. Evlyn had always been fond of the Belvidere, and indeed, even in his step-mother’s time, it had been considered really as his room, and his things were in it; but he didn’t go there often now, for he felt—or only hoped, p’r’aps—his

I had to tell that at the trial, the judge knew at once that it was with Mr. Haslam he'd had the appointment up there, and of course it was, for Mr. Haslam passed up soon after him. I was down in Rocklands the rest of the day, and so didn't note that the key wasn't brought back, though I shouldn't anyhow, for often it wasn't returned to me the same day. But that evening, one of the keepers passing the Belvidere at dusk found it open, and going to the upstairs room to speak to his master, as he fancied—the lower room is only an entrance—he saw nobody there but Mr. Haslam, shot dead and lying across the doorway. He found the window open, and the old rails freshly broken, and there below, on the stony edge of the river, Mr. Evelyn was lying insensible—his head had struck a stone. But he had escaped the water. Everybody said that after shooting Mr. Haslam he had intended to escape, and sprang from the window, forgetting the little wooden balcony, and had broken it in his eagerness—the rails were

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very rotten, and easily broken. They said of course he had intended to go through one of the other windows, from which he could have jumped so easily, but that he had been maddened by his conscience, and sprang from that window because it was the furthest from the dead body that lay across the doorway. I went up next day, and the blood hadn't sunk into the carpet—it never does, they say—and it has been a horrible place to me ever since.'

'Was no one else ever suspected of this murder?' asked Mary, very low.

'Never,' Miss Brock assured us, 'though the p'lice searched the country, and moved everything in the Belvidere. I'd a detective staying here a good while prowling night and day, searching every place, and everybody, and everything, because some people thought there might have been a third person there; but the notion had to be given up, it all was so clear. Hadn't they been always enemies, and hadn't Mr. Haslam been very unfair and aggravated Mr. Evlyn to the deed? And wasn't it Mr. Evlyn's own pistol that he kept in the Belvidere that had shot him, and wasn't its own bullet found in him? It was only too clear, and they said it was through some very clever

FOR SOME TIME.

‘No,’ I said, feeling Miss Brock’s stern little eyes questioning me, ‘I suppose there is—was, no hope of a third person being discovered.’

‘No hope. I’m certain everything was done that could be done. If anybody else had passed to the Belvidere, I must have seen him.’

‘But it can be reached easily without passing this house,’ said I, remembering how we had come.

‘Possibly,’ Miss Brock allowed; ‘but it would not be tried while this is the established path.’

‘And all this would not have happened if the son had been allowed to come in time for his father to know him,’ said Mary, and rose and looked around her; just as if she only studied the innumerable photographs of the manor—taken under every conceivable aspect—which adorned the walls. Then, evidently for the purpose of getting rid of Miss Brock, she asked for lunch.

‘Oh! Barbara,’ she cried, when we were at last alone, ‘I will find out this secret. There is some one for us to—unmask. You will help me? We will clear the innocent, if——’

‘If he be innocent, yes,’ said I, practically, in her pause.

‘I meant to say if—I die for it.’

Fortunately, as I thought, Miss Brock returned just then to present us with her card, and another bearing the name of the Rev. John Sladeley Gunn. ‘The clergyman who enjoys my other parlour,’ she explained, in a stately manner, ‘with his two little boys. He’s taking our parson’s place for a time. He’s liked very well, an’ I heard him once, but I do mostly go to preachin’.’

‘Does not he preach?’ asked Mary, in her quiet, humorous way, though of course she understood.

‘Preach, yes, that grammatical that we do ought to take dictionaries. But ’tis beautiful to hear him read about Daniel. Daniel answers quite plain from far away in the lion’s den. If he preached in two or three voices like that, he’d have large congregations, yes, I b’lieve. He do try to make me a church-goer, but I tell him we’re best mixed like our tea. But he

will die with much on her mind unsaid——’ but I saw that Mary did not even hear me.’

‘Oh, Barry,’ she sighed, as she still sat against the window, ‘who can have come to the tower on that day and done such a deed? How can we learn this terrible secret, with no clue at all, however faint?’

‘I don’t know,’ I said, heavily, staring at the varied representations of the Manor, photographed with startling truth and ugliness. ‘I cannot see the narrowest ray of hope.’ And it was just as I said it, with my eyes fixed upon a delineation of the avenue unbiassed by perspective, that there darted into my mind—no; nothing ever darted into my mind—that a struggling fancy began to take hold of me; and took it more and more firmly through every minute, until it was a haunting, harassing idea, which I determined to set at rest, whatever trouble the doing so should cost me. So absorbing had it become by the time Miss Brock, in her deliberate manner, had removed the cloth,

and feelingly inquired if we had not found the cold beef 'of a pretty savour,' that, though I knew it to be but a feeble step, I was wrought up to invention in my determination to carry it out.

'As I need a little solitary walk to get my ideas clear, Mary, and you are anxious to discourse Miss Brock, I shall go to Rocklands, and send a note to Silla by the return coach. Is she to come out to you to-morrow?'

'Oh, Barry, we do not want her here,' said Mary, blankly. 'Yet,' she added, her own kind, thoughtful self again, 'she must not stay at Westercombe alone, and—Miss Brock will have her. Thank you, Barbara.' And then her head went back against the lattice-panes, and I felt ashamed of my paltering.

I did not leave her until I had only time to catch the coach before its return, and then I hastened away, repeating to myself all along the road to Rocklands, the date of that murder, which I had looked back into my diary to learn. The coach was just leaving when I reached the hotel, and our genial driver touched his hat when he saw me, and said I was only just in time. When I had given him the note for Silla, I asked him, weighing every word, in my usual

the copies were sold at the time, but that one was always kept at the hotel, and, though they sometimes sold them after, sometimes they did not, and so I should find plenty, for the coach ran daily from the middle of June to the middle of August, and twice a week for a short time before and after.

‘Of course I wish to buy the one taken to-day,’ said I, ‘but I should like to see the others.’

The men-servants of the hotel stood about to watch the coach depart, and I found, too, that another coach was expected from one of the Great Western stations; so I felt it better to delay my errand, for fear of not doing it so well in the confusion. As I stood, with what patience I might, I became aware of two little boys, hand in hand in the road, evidently awaiting some arrival; and then of their being paternally reprimanded by our driver as ‘venturesome,’ and, under this reproof, backing towards the hedge, and standing there, still hand in hand, and still hopefully expectant.

They were sturdy, thick-set little fellows, with bare, brown legs, and dusty boots and socks, yet there was to me a quaint nobility in their little sunburnt faces; the big black eyes were so ridiculously intrepid, the lips so babyish. As I watched, my heart went so strangely out to them that at last I went up and asked them if they were waiting for anyone. The smaller child—he was only very little the smaller—eyed me with a sort of phlegmatic sternness, evidently questioning my right to address him at all, though not moved to anger; but the other, with a glance of superiority at his brother, politely informed me that they were waiting for ‘John.’

‘Oh, for *John*?’ said I, with the air of friendliness which is supposed to be acceptable to children. ‘And who are you?’

‘I’m Trot,’ said the little fellow, with a look in his large deep-set eyes which said, pensively, ‘I’m a great man where I come from, but I drop my greatness here.’

‘And you?’ I asked, touching the shoulder of the smaller boy. He looked back at me with an immoveably serene apathy which made me colour over the liberty I had taken, and feel grateful that he did not resent it actively.

wide open gaze the fact that even, his brother's condescension to me did not disturb his equanimity ; and then I smiled weakly but well meaningly upon the little fellows, and wondered whether there was anything else that I could say. But I could not find that there was, while those four great black eyes scrutinised me impartially.

I had forgotten the departing and arriving vehicles, when there came up to the boys—and therefore to me—some one whom I had surely seen before : a stout little clergyman with a good and kindly face. He held out to the eager children one plump white hand, while with the other he raised his hat to me, and in a moment I was aware that he recognised me, and that he was going to introduce himself to me, not only with the consciousness of a clergyman's right to do so, but in a cheery, friendly way that was perfectly courteous.

‘This is strange ! We met yesterday in a London restaurant, and though I have travelled hard all day I find you here before me.’

‘We came yesterday to Westercombe straight from—where you saw us,’ I said, unable to resent the simple, unconstrained address. Not until I was going over this conversation afterwards—as I invariably do to my disappointment and weariness—did it strike me that this was a bold acknowledgment of my having noticed him, for he did not show the faintest sign of thinking it so. ‘You must have come by a very fast train to-day.’

‘The Flying Dutchman,’ he said, with a pleasant laugh, ‘and I have decided with myself that if David had lived in the year of the world 1881, instead of desiring the wings of a dove, he would have said I’ll catch the Flying Dutchman and flee away. How kind of you to be taking a passing interest in my little lads, who are very naughty to be here at all. Their father is very grateful, I assure you.’

‘But,’ I said, in my slowly comprehending way, ‘they said they were waiting for “John.”’

‘That’s myself,’ he answered, with a look of the tenderest merriment down upon the children. ‘Their filial piety is remarkable. I ought to tell you I am taking duty here for a time, and we lodge at the Ladyhouse.’

‘So do we,’ I said, in my shy, scant way; my

‘It is a pleasant house, and Miss Angerona—I like that simple name, and use it in preference to Brock—with her Cornish words and ways, is amusingly un-English.’

Then we parted. He had asked me if he might walk back with me, but, though I knew it would be pleasant to have congenial companionship on my way, I feared I might unconsciously hasten or perform my errand superficially if I felt I was detaining anyone, so declined ; telling him I had business in the hotel. As he went on his way, with one sturdy little fellow pulling at each hand, I just momentarily wondered whether Mary had observed him in London, and would recognize him ; half wishing I could have been present to see the renewal of that strange, prompt interest he had taken in her. Then I utterly forgot him as I entered the hotel.

The manager took me to the drawing-room, and brought me some books that looked like scrap books, where he told me I should find the

photographs I spoke of; each season having a collection to itself, and each book being dated. I feel quite sure it was because he saw how childishly my fingers trembled over finding the date I wanted, that he left me alone to my task. The great room was unoccupied then, save by my own insignificant person, and I paused with a half smile at myself, for my plan suddenly looked to me futile and even imbecile. What had I been expecting to discover? Even if I found out who were the passengers to Rocklands on the day of that murder, could that discovery give the slenderest clue to any possible murderer? What a poor frail hope mine was, and how characteristic of me, after all!

This honest disdain of my own intellect roused me to act, but with a new, unhopeful carelessness. I took up the book dated 1878, and turned its leaves slowly to June 27th. There were several blank pages in the book, but that page was not blank. There stood the coach, two or three pigmy human figures standing down upon the ground beside it to show off its loftiness and its importance; and the four horses, apparently very fiery, but held in check by the driver's infinite skill. It was exactly like the photograph

knew him in a moment, and scarcely was surprised that three years ago he looked no smaller and no younger than he looked to-day! There were but four faces then for me to fix upon my mind, so I studied them slowly one by one. On the box a boyish, frank-looking young fellow, with fishing-rod and basket; on the seat behind, an elderly gentleman of great size; an evidently foreign artist, with flowing locks and beard, holding a sketching portfolio conspicuously; and between them one lady——

Half an hour later, I shook off the strange mist that had enshrouded me, and started on my homeward walk, unutterably lonely and heart-sick, fighting strenuously and zealously against suspicion and mistrust, longing with great intensity for the opportunity to speak one word to Denis now. All the time keeping my eyes turned from the river, because the sunset threw strange red stains upon it as it came on towards me from below that tower on the heath; and

dreading beyond all words my meeting with the girl whom I—against my better judgment, I had often told myself before this day—had grown to love so well. For the photograph had shown me that one of the passengers to Rocklands on the day of that murder in the Belvidere had been Mary Keveene herself!

Sunday, July 31.

I rose this morning with the same vague feeling of mistrust against which I had so persistently, yet vainly, struggled last night; with the same hatred of myself for this distrust, and yet with the same cowardly dread of hearing Mary mention anything connected with that day of the murder three years ago. I had not looked again at the photograph I bought last evening, but yet it seemed to be before my eyes all through the wakeful night.

I only waited for the eastern light to climb the hills and bring a tender smile upon the western sea, before I rose, grateful in my heart for the country sounds and sights and scents around me. This was so different from our Chiswick home, with the red houses close upon us before and behind, and hand in hand with us on either side. So different even from the tame view of

My lattice window was wide open while I dressed, and the Devon roses nodded in and cheered me, making me forget the harassed wakefulness of the past night. Then I leaned through to drink a deeper draught of the new joy and freshness of the morning, and, doing so, I saw two children standing hand in hand upon the doorstep. I waited—smiling to see the little fellows expectant, just as they had been when I had seen them first—until I heard a strong, swift step upon the road; the click of the little gate; and then a voice, half laughing, half scarifying—‘Go in! go in! You’ll certainly catch the worm if you’re out so early.’ Then little pattering, hastening, eager steps down the garden-path, a merry call to ‘John,’ and, following that, a trio of laughter down below the roses. I did not look out again, nor did I hurry over dressing; somehow I felt more content, less lonely and uneasy. I had thought myself early—as I certainly was, compared with our Sunday morning appearances at home—but, when I went downstairs, I found Mary sitting at our parlour

window, looking as if she had been down for hours. All through breakfast I fought with this new painful restraint that held me in her presence; but the fight grew easier and easier, as I saw that she herself had had little or no sleep, and yet that she so tenderly devoted herself to me, coaxing me to eat, and saying unsuspiciously that she could see I had had what Silla calls 'bad rest;' talking brightly to me, as if no shadow dimmed her own awaking.

'Listen!' I said, as through our open window came the chime of the village bells. 'You will go to church, Mary?'

'I should like to go,' she said, looking absently far down the river's track, 'if it is not wrong to go only for the sake of a rest.'

I would have told her I thought it good to know that rest was to be won there, but I am so awkward, and never can say properly, or in time, what I mean.

'If you do not mind, Mary,' said I, as, going upstairs together, we paused at the sound of the children's arguments—I had seen Mr. Gunn go to the schools some time before, and, if I had not, should have known he was absent by the different tone in his children's voices, for their nurse was a rather incapable as well as dismal

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Their delight over this project may have been great, but their evidence of it was measured. Trot's lofty excellence could not stoop to more than a brief, sweet smile, while Nap's stoicism was entirely and perfectly impenetrable. They were dressed with willingness by the maid, who was apparently delighted at the prospect of being for a time released from what possibly weighed upon her mind as a responsibility, and we soon set off. Nap, having on a fresh little white tunic, took occasion to tumble down in the dustiest bit of the road, and wore a most impaired appearance afterwards; but, except for this diversion, we reached the church in safety and in time. But I can freely confess now that the service was an ordeal to me through which I have no wish to pass again, at present; for there had been a sort of tacit understanding between us that Mary should have charge of Trot, and I of Nap, and envy ate my heart away through every minute of the service. Trot's saintly bearing was perfect, and

his devout and concentrated contemplation of the congregation certainly was all that Mary could have desired; but to be custodian of Nap I found to be a task not equally light. For a time he gave himself up to a thorough and unhindered investigation of everything, from the height of the seat on which I had perched him, then fell into a steady, unintermittent regard of my features, his head turned that he might comfortably conduct it, and that solemn, and yet half humorous gaze of his growing more steadfast as I writhed under it. I tried touching him, as if accidentally, with the end of my sturdy white umbrella, and I tried smiling sweetly into his face, but nothing disturbed him. With enviable persistence and firmness he, unmoved, continued his grave study of my face. I knew I should presently have to take the child out of church, and I was very sorry, for the simple country service was good for me. I tried to forget him, and for this purpose I looked about me. Then it was I noticed that almost everyone seemed to be regarding Mary. I wondered what the rustics thought of the lovely face, and what the few fashionably attired visitors thought of the plain brown dress, but I wondered more what Mr. Gunn thought when

sermon was half over now! Just then, as I hoped this and yet feared it, for the words were like fresh air to me, Mr. Gunn quoted a few lines which I was certain I had seen or heard before—

‘Till the stars grow old,
And the moon grows cold,
And the leaves of the judgment book unfold.’

Instead of listening further, I was hunting through the chambers of my memory for the source of this, and finally fancied that an American poet had written what he was pleased to call a Moorish love-song, in which he vows to love the queen of his affections until the period therein indicated. I have heard many poets quoted in the pulpit, but the Moorish love-song is a new experience. Through this brief recess Nap’s scrutiny never wavered. I saw Mary smile at last, and I tried to do so too; but it was heavy work under that close investigation, and I had lost my fleeting bravery, and was just succumbing, when (to my relief) Nap

turned his head to the pulpit. But, after a grave contemplation of his father there, he clearly and loudly broke the silence of the congregation—

‘Come home now, John.’

My horror can only feebly be described when this infant in my care—actually held at the moment within my encircling arm—tendered this friendly counsel to our pastor, with such an evident conviction of its wisdom and such stolid contempt for its repression. In a panic I put my fingers on the little pouting lips, and, avoiding a glance either at Mr. Gunn or at Mary, took the child out of church, hating myself for having been the cause of this extraordinary address to the pulpit. But I had no idea what reproof to administer, or how to improve the occasion, so—weakly silent myself—I let him walk stolidly beside me, until he tumbled down. After that, I—still more weakly—carried him, for I was glad to hasten home, give him up to his nurse, and hide my own diminished head.

No words can tell how apprehensively I awaited the return of Mr. Gunn, and was quite grateful to Miss Brock for happening to be in our room, laying the cloth for our early dinner.

‘’Twas a pity you had the trouble of ’em,’

but a limpet shell 'pon top of her head.'

'But it is such fine warm weather,' suggested I, meekly, wondering what my bonnet looked like in Miss Angerona's eyes.

'Oh! yes, the weather's handsome, sure nuff,' she allowed. 'We get a fine passel of mercies we do never stop to count up. The Almighty is fine and good to us one way and 'nother; and that girl, though she's ben poorly all mornin', is purty clever again now. Lor', miss, we must all of us feel slight now and then. Now, I do hope you two'll eat some dinner to-day, for the meat do go poor this weather if 't isn't eaten. I've got the key of the Belvidere usable now, and you shall have it this afternoon. What time shall you want tea?'

'Any time that will suit you best,' I said, acting on Mary's principle.

'Lor', miss, never mind,' said Miss Brock, cordially. 'If you're late, the girl will wait on you all right; for I do mostly go to chapel in evenin's. I do very often have a bit o' nap in

the afternoons, an' then I do like to go to preachin' in the evenin', 'cause I can sleep so much better after bein' out a bit.'

Just then I saw Mr. Gunn come up the garden with Mary—Trot walking in advance—and I felt thankful to be sheltered in our own room; but my heart fell when Mary actually brought him straight in with her, telling me he would not be denied thanking me for my enterprise. His hearty laugh over our adventure did me good, and then, while he idled in our low parlour, giving it a curious homeliness, I thought, I told them, with an imitation of Miss Brock's Cornish, her last speech to me.


'A rather original reason for attending Divine worship,' said Mr. Gunn, with his pleasant laugh. 'It reminds me of a motive given by one of her countrymen to tardy almsgivers to provoke them to good works—an old friend of mine heard it. A missionary meeting was held at Porthleven, and the necessity of sending the Gospel to the heathen in foreign parts was strongly urged. One good brother who belonged to Porthleven, and knew a great deal of local politics, concluded his oration thusly:—"I do hope, friends, that there'll be a good collection, and I think you did ought to come out liberal

almost forgotten my ignominious exit from church.

Presently Mary called the children in, and in her pretty, easy way, amused and played with them, trying to make me do so too, but I could not, for I could not sufficiently forget myself. I was not astonished that Mr. Gunn looked with such quiet, intense pleasure at her, and so forbearingly left unnoticed my awkward advances; yet he specially addressed me before he left, to pretend he did not see my discomfiture.

‘Nap is not the only child in Rocklands who has covered himself with glory to-day, Miss Os-
well,’ he said, with a smile for me, and a kind touch upon his boy’s hair. ‘There was a brisk little girl in the school who told me Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by brimstone and treacle.’ Then he went away laughing, and left us far more ready for dinner than we should have been.

When it was over, Miss Brock brought in the key of the Belvidere (not very shining), and we



strolled out. I paused in the garden, fancying Mary would like to visit the tower alone, but she looked at me wistfully.

‘ You will come, Barry ?’

‘ Oh, yes,’ I said, quite naturally, the moment I saw it was what she wished. ‘ You cannot get rid of me now you have brought me so far, Mary. We shall have a delightful walk, for it is indeed what Miss Angerona called “ handsome weather sure nuff.” ’

Yet, for all my studied unconstraint, I found, as we went on, I could not throw from my mind its great anxiety. As we neared the Belvidere, I talked to Mary on irrelevant matters ; but this was always an effort to me, and defeated its own ends. I began to think it as impossible for me to still my doubts, vague as they were, as to stop the motion in the spikelets of quaking grass I gathered ; so I fell into silence just as she had done, and stood turned away from her, looking down upon the purple slope of moorland, while she fitted the key in the lock, and opened the door ; for I seemed to understand so well the trembling of her fingers over the task. Then I followed her, lazily as I could seem to do, into the tower, and up the few stairs which led straight from the lower room—evidently

on each of the three sides, and beyond the one over the river I saw the broken rails still standing ; ugly reminders of the tragedy this little place (built for pleasure) had witnessed. Below each window was a semi-circular little bracket-table. On one stood an old-fashioned ruby claret-glass, on one a well-worn blotting-book and inkstand ; and on the other a heavy, antique tobacco-jar. But what added greatly to the furnished look of the room was the fact that the door was lined with book-shelves, so well filled that to close it behind us was quite a labour ; but when we had done so the whole character of the room was changed, even though below it, upon the dark green carpet, lay that great stain so visible still !

I was examining everything in this slow, deliberate way ; partly to avoid a glance at Mary, and partly to avoid a thought of what she felt, or even a remembrance of that mystery between us, when her voice startled me, it was so oddly strained and perplexed.

‘Barbara, I have such a strange, strange feeling! I cannot understand it. Did you ever enter a room that you seemed to know? Did you ever seem to have been in a place before, and yet not know you have? What is it? I seem to have been here before, but on a different day, a misty, brooding day. I know the scene. The bridge down there, the river, the bank, the heather, the road beyond. Even one sheltered spot where the Mayweed is in blossom—yet it is so late for that. Yes, it was late, I remember, then. And the river sobbed and wailed. How do I know that, when to-day it is so glad and swift? Listen! Is not the water rushing merrily in summer gladness? Barbara, what does it mean? Have I been—mad?’

‘My dear,’ I cried, putting my arms about her, and softly kissing her white cheek, trying vainly, I fear, to hide from her the fact that I was frightened, ‘come home now. This is a chill, damp, uninhabited, uncomfortable, unsociable place,’ for I scarcely knew what to urge to entice her away, while there came back to me that insane longing for Denis, as if he were the only one who could help her now or advise me.

‘Yes,’ said Mary, repeating my words in a

whisper, her eyes wild and feverish in her pale face,—‘I—recognise this room, and yet I do not. Tell me what we came for. Was it’—dazedly looking round—‘to gain some clue to—who was here with Evlyn? Did we say that appointment he came to keep was not with the man who was murdered? I forget. But if it is not a dream—look on that upper shelf, Barbara, and I think all the volumes will be’—her hand upon her side, as if in pain—“State Trials.”’

‘No, I will not, Mary,’ said I, sturdily. ‘I hate dreams to be remembered. They are all nonsense and indigestion and untruth. This wretched room makes my head ache, and I shall faint if you keep me here.’ I never have fainted in my life, and have not the slightest idea with what sensation it begins, but I could not help this excuse, as I laid my fingers soothingly for a moment on her wide, bewildered eyes.

‘I am so sorry, Barbara,’ she said, in her sweet, pitiful tones. ‘Come away. I am selfish to have kept you. You are right. Let us shake

off the horror of this place, dear. I was forgetting it was Sunday. Why did we choose to-day? Now come back to our own quiet rooms, and you will play to me, won't you?

'Yes,' said I, shakily; for it occurred to me that my music would scarcely soothe her, and how few things I could play without notes, only two or three showy pieces of a boisterous and tumultuous character, learned to perform at any party where I had no help for it, and I thought of the last one, and how, if she asked me what it was, it would not sound soothing to say, 'Valse Caprice, by Tschaiikowsky, op. 4.'


I found myself repeating this tranquillising explanation again and again, as—still with my affected headache and faintness—I decoyed Mary from the Belvidere, without having allowed her to discover what books occupied the upper one of these curious book-shelves.

But when we reached the Ladyhouse a great surprise awaited us—and yet somehow it seems now as if it could have been no surprise to me—for Denis was there! What a different aspect everything had to me then! And yet I saw, below all his courteously cheerful entertainment of us, that there was upon him—as there had been and still was upon me—a restraint against

a troubled way, though I really did try not to do so. I fancied Denis did so too; but it was quite plain to me that she was not aware of this. At first I thought she looked vexed to see Denis, but afterwards it struck me she was glad he had found us.

As for him, restless though he certainly was, even I, dull as I am, could not mistake the fact that it was a delight to him to be once more in her presence, and that his eyes never grew weary of following her. During tea (and we all seemed determined to idle over our country tea) I had wondered whether the conversation would touch upon the motive of our visit here; scarce knowing whether I hoped or feared it; but when the lingering meal was over, and Denis had followed Mary to the old-fashioned seat in the lattice window, which was her favourite lounge, he set my mind at rest, just in his usually straightforward, direct way.

‘My father’s place, Miss Keveene, is not far from here. I mean the place that was my father’s. He sold it.’



‘What a pity,’ said Mary, listlessly; and I fancied she had forgotten all I had told her about Denis paying his father’s debts; but of course I had not told her old Mr. Vesey had sold the place without even consulting his son.

‘And I used,’ he went on; and I saw that he was steadily regarding Mary, as he sat beside her; ‘to pass this house sometimes, and ride under that little Belvidere on the height. But that was before the murder which made the spot shunned and avoided. Strange to say, I have never been within sight of it since the evening of that day.

‘What day?’ asked Mary, very white, and still, and cold.

‘The day that George Haslam was murdered in that tower.’

‘How strange!’ said Mary. ‘Did you know this Mr. Haslam?’

‘I did a little, and, though so little, quite enough to make me anxious that the boy, who is now owner of Rocklands Manor, should break from his guidance. Since Haslam’s death, the lad has been a different fellow. I often see him—he is at Eton now—and rejoice to feel that he will be such a man as I hear that his father was, years ago. It is a vile thing to say

earnest in his quiet way than I think I had ever seen him, and his eyes so kind and anxious, 'I was almost painfully interested in the circumstances of the murder. I had to go to India just after it occurred, else I should have striven in the trial to do something towards solving the mystery which I feel sure still exists. I would like to do so.'

'It is too late for you, Mr. Vesey,' said Mary, lifting her lashes for one swift gaze into his face. 'You say you passed here on the day of the murder. Think what might have been if you had made a discovery then! Now your turn has passed, and it is mine.'

'If so, Mary,' said Denis, in a new, relieved tone, as if at last he had heard her utter words he had been longing for; 'let me help you.'

'Help me?' she said, with a swift, sad laugh, and rose as she spoke. 'I need no help—no other help. I have my generous, faithful Barbara. Didn't you promise to play to me, Bar-

bara? Do, for I am so weary of the water's sound.'

I glanced at Denis, a little alarmed, I fear, for the water's sound could not be heard from the Ladyhouse, and I dare say I glanced appealingly, too (as I felt), for he understood.

'May I play instead?' he asked, simply, and even he could not help seeing Mary's grateful look, and must have felt pleased.

Some of the things he played I knew, but most of them I did not even wish to know. It was pleasure enough to listen to the dreamy beautiful thoughts he knew so well how to utter, and to see that even for Mary this, indeed, was rest. Once long ago Denis had laughed at me when I was wondering over his having learned so much music off book, and told me that what he loved he could not help making his own, but I do not think I had ever heard his music sound just as it did this evening. It was while he was playing one of the bits I recognised, a plaintive Sarabande of Handel's, and my eyes were absently wandering from one to another of the photographs of Rocklands Manor surrounding us, that I quite suddenly, as it seemed to me, and not in my usually gradual, deliberate way,

in my ridiculously unstable way, till the music ceased, after a beautiful slow movement of Clementi's which left the tears in my eyes.

'You played Bach chiefly, did you not?' said Mary, as he joined her, speaking unconcernedly, yet I saw that she looked through a mist of tears which she resolutely kept from falling. 'Is not *bach* the German for *brook*, yet his music is not so like its blithesome merry flow, as—as an ocean of peace and power.'

'It is wholesome music,' said I, lamely; glad to turn away from the harassing effect of those photographs in the dusk.

'It is wise music,' said Mary, absently; and Denis smiled as he sat down by her. He talked to both of us, but his voice grew low with untold tenderness when he addressed Mary, and presently I decided I would go out and await him, that I might be certain of the opportunity to speak to him alone.

I went upstairs for the photograph and a shawl, and, as Miss Brock's mansion is not on a

very extensive scale, I could not help being aware that there was something wrong in the children's room, and that the nurse had wilily set the door wide open; either to silence a refractory mortal through his dread of publicity, or to entrap any passer-by into acting unconscious bogle. As I passed, she looked up with fairly well assumed surprise and awe, and cried, 'O, Nap, here's one of the ladies! She'll cry to see you so naughty.'

I cannot say I could readily have done so, even for the glorious result of Nap's conversion, but I could still less have done so a moment later, seeing his instantly awakened, hopeful anticipation of this result. He would evidently have enjoyed the sight of tears in my eyes, and his study of my countenance grew for him appallingly lively. I was far too conscious of my own inability to improve the occasion to venture within, or question the child's nurse on what was wrong; but Trot met me thoughtfully, and in his sweetly superior manner informed me of Nap's transgression.

'He won't say his prayers, and John said we were to go to bed before he came home. I've said mine, and if Nap doesn't he won't be the boy the Good Lord loves.'

that I hoped they would not hear—for I knew that, though Trot would pardon it, Nap would sturdily despise me for it—I escaped.

Having got my cloak and the photograph, I went slowly downstairs; and then, thinking Denis might await my return to bid me good night, and so frustrate my plan, I opened the sitting-room door to tell him; but softly, because he was singing, and I would not disturb them. So I heard the conclusion of the song—

I dream of thee
When evening shadows on the streamlet play;
When softly fades the golden light of day;
When the sweet moon glides slowly on her way;
Then, love, I dream of thee!

I dream of thee
With anxious longing and with timid fear,
Yet with sweet pain in every starting tear;
Thou couldst not be more loved, nor be less dear.
Thus, love, I dream of thee!

‘I have taken that freely from the German, have I not, Miss Keveene?’ Denis said, ‘and the

melody is Schubert's, because it seemed to fit so wonderfully. Mean of me, wasn't it? But I could not resist singing that—to you—Sunday though it be.'

'You should not to me,' said Mary, quietly. 'To anyone but me. I have valued your friendship—I have indeed, though I have seemed to—but I wish you had never offered me more.'

And, before I had time to speak, just like the knight he had once spoken of—'who loved one only, and who clave to her'—he stooped and touched her hand with his lips.

Without a word I left the room again, then spoke in cheerfully as I reached the open window: 'Denis, I am going for a little constitutional. You will pass me on your way out, and I can bid you good night then.' So, with a nod, I went.

What a tender sweetness there was in the twilight! Somehow, when Mr. Gunn came up to me on the bridge, it seemed as if our natures have their twilight hours too; for the blaze of his sunny merriment had passed, and his words and manner had the peaceful quietness of the twilight scene around us. He asked at once for my friend—of course his first thought would

gregation he had had in this sparely-peopled spot ; and how he had had to pull himself up when he caught himself saying, ‘ many of you will remember,’ &c. But he did not go in then, and as I did not like to turn aside, because of missing Denis, nor to go back for fear Mary herself should stroll with him as far as the gate, we walked slowly to and fro, backwards and forwards, on the bridge, while the twilight paled and paled, and between the grand, dark, scattered clouds the stars came slowly forth. I do not know what he said, but I know it was all good, and wide, and charitable, and I like to think my empty years have held that peaceful hour.

He went in only when he heard Denis come through the garden-gate, and knew then whom I was awaiting, and I stood where I was until Denis came up, so deep in thought that he started visibly, and almost painfully, when I addressed him.

‘ I waited here to speak to you, Denis,’ I began, as awkwardly shy as usual.

‘Yes, Barry?’ he said, in his gentle way, and offering me his hand, as if that were a tangible encouragement.

‘Of Mary,’ I went on. .

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘but not in the same absent tone.

‘You are her friend, I know, Denis,’ I said, making only a step at a time.

‘Her lover, Barbara.’

‘Yes, her lover,’ I amended, with the swift, passionate rising of a lump in my throat. ‘I understand, Denis. It is *because* I understand that I have decided to consult you. I cannot help her in her trouble, and—perhaps you can.’

‘No, I cannot,’ he said, heavily. ‘You heard her say so.’

‘But you will listen to me, Denis; and you will try?’

‘Try? Oh, yes, I will try,’ he said, with an odd, curt laugh. ‘Surely I can be as faithful as she called *her Barbara*.’

‘Hush, Denis, please;’ for the mood was so unlike the steadfast, patient friend of such long years. ‘I will soon have finished. Walk here slowly, and so, if Mary comes, we shall not be unprepared.’

Then, walking just as Mr. Gunn and I had walked, and yet, for some inscrutable whim of

covery which had brought her here. Then, rather hesitatingly—for I feared what he might say to any independent act of mine, I had so seldom committed them—I told him of my fancy of the photograph helping us in our clue for a possible third person who might have been in the ‘Belvidere’ that day three years ago, and how I had gone back to buy the photograph, and found that one of the visitors to Rocklands on that day was Mary herself—offering him the photograph to take with him, and look at afterwards. Indeed, I quite fancied he might have seen it, for I felt sure the detective would have hunted it up, though to him the passengers would be equally unsuspecting, even if traceable.

‘Hold it, Barbara,’ he said, in a stern sort of way, and he lighted a wax match and held it to the paper, for in the still night air the little flame burnt steadily. Then he was so silent that I did not like to speak, but I eagerly watched his face, as far as I could see it with the frail light touching it.

‘Yes, it is Mary Keveene,’ he said, and for a moment I saw a passion of angry love and desperate tenderness on his pale face, ‘unmistakably so, though the Mary Keveene of three years ago more, of course, than of to-day. Barbara—no, do not take it; leave it with me—I will tell you now where and how and when I met her first. I told you that what had so long puzzled me I understood when once more I saw her troubled and confused. You heard me tell her this evening how I had passed the Belvidere on the day of that murder three years ago? Barbara—it was then I saw her.’

‘Oh, Denis, hush, hush!’ I cried, and clasped my hands upon my ears, though of course he knew the photograph might have prepared me for this; ‘I cannot bear it.’

‘Yes, you can, Barry,’ he said, as kindly and gently as if he knew no suffering himself. ‘It is only something which we in time shall comprehend, and to speak of it is best. I remember it all well now. It came back to me on that morning in Henry’s room, when I saw the same pale, lovely face, the same scared glance from the sorrowful dark eyes, and the same half-shrinking attitude of the tall young figure. I was driving from my father’s place to Wester-

on the river's bank, I heard a quick, light, hurrying step, and was sure I also heard a low and pitiful sobbing. But my friend talked on, evidently hearing nothing, and so I did not stop; but—listening all the time—drove more slowly still. And then—and then,' said Denis, uncovering his head, and pushing the hair from his face, 'a woman came out into the road, as if straight to stop us; a woman young and tall and beautiful—but you know her; what need have I to say it? She seemed to be looking straight at me as she came in sight; her face terribly pale, but her eyes so dry and wide that it was a shock to me to see them so, after the grievous sobbing I had heard. She drew back when she saw us, and stood turning her head away, as if to prove she had no thought of us. I raised my hat involuntarily, for I could not help fancying she had hurried out into the road when she had heard our horses, and then she spoke to me, just quietly and calmly as a lady would, while still that

fire was in her wide, dry eyes. She had mistaken, she said, the sound of our wheels, for those of the coach to Westercombe. No need to say I begged her to let us drive her if she had missed the coach, but my friend assured her she had not; and so, with a little bow, she walked from us, and we drove on. Just at first this lovely, sorrowful face haunted me, but my friend laughed about 'the pretty damsel who had lost her party,' until I thought that was all, and it soon passed quite out of my mind. You know how a dim memory haunted me now and then in Miss Keveene's society, when I met her in Weymouth: it was the faint, almost dead memory of her face as I had seen it here; but the distinct remembrance returned to me on the day I saw her in Henry's room, with the same tearless misery in the beautiful eyes, and the same shrinking attitude. We were talking then of the murder which must on that other evening just have been committed, and thus the two days were brought together by a flash in my thoughts.'

'Then, Denis,' I gasped, 'you—really believe
—',

'I believe,' he said, just like the loyal gentle-

have been present in the Belvidere, Denis? Can you understand her wish to find that out when she——'

'Hush, dear,' said Denis, very low and patiently, but just as if he reminded me that no one had a right to doubt her. 'She will not take my help, and I love her too well to force it upon her; but she knows how wholly and entirely my heart is hers, and perhaps some day, when she remembers this, she will let me be of use to her. But even now she will take your help, and gratefully. Be true to her, dear Barbara, and help her all you can.'

And I said I would, just looking up among the quiet stars, as if that would help me to be as true and unsuspicious as he was.

Wednesday, August 3rd, 1881.

For three days I have not written in my diary. I have been, like Mary, too restless and unsettled, but I fear it was also because I have been suspicious and uncomfortable, even in

spite of trying to imitate Denis. Mary has avoided the Belvidere for these three days, spending them in the constant pursuit of a phantom hope we never reach. She goes into the cottages for miles around, and will sit and listen by the hour to anyone who will talk to her, on the chance of hearing what might be a clue to the discovery on which her heart is set. On the plea of buying milk, she will take me into the farm kitchens and talk, if not to the master or mistress, to the servants she may see. She will sit on the river bank beside a man who is fishing, or stand in the fields and talk to the labourers. Anywhere, with anyone, she will seek for a chance word which may throw a ray of light, however feeble, upon that dark hour's deed that some one did three years ago. But the light never yet has fallen upon it.

And all this time I keep with her, and try to be true to her, haunted by the vision Denis left me of this girl hurrying from the Belvidere—surely bearing in her heart some clue to the terrible secret for which she seeks so indefatigably now—and puzzled beyond all words by the consciousness of what she herself must know of that cruel day.

With Mr. Gunn Mary has tried to discuss the

heart aches to see her try to speak of this deed as if to her it were a mere matter of casual interest, while I feel that untiringly, unrestingly, undespairingly, she will follow up her search, even if it be life-long.

Sometimes she is, in her moods to me, feverishly impatient, sometimes unutterably weary; but often she shakes off memory, as it were, for my sake, and that mood I like least of all.

Though Denis stayed all through last Monday at the Rocklands Hotel, he did not come to us again. He had bidden Mary farewell, as I felt sure, and would not intrude upon her after that. Never since he left her on Sunday night had we mentioned his name until this evening, when I could no longer bear her unnatural reticence about him, and so talked of him as if I knew of no reason at all why his name should not be uttered between us just as easily as of old—though indeed it never was quite easily uttered between us two, at first because of my mean nature, though I did strive against that

inexcusable jealousy, and afterwards because of the sorrow of his love for her, and her sad consciousness of this sorrow. She did not stop me, though I saw a patient shadow in her eyes while her thoughts were thus made to hold him. And though I hated to give her pain, and felt how vain my efforts were to turn her heart to him, yet I considered it well to talk of him. I think that, if we had once let his name become buried in an unexplained silence, the feeling would have grown incurable. That was why I talked of him as we came home this evening, and though it was but very shallow talk—even Mary herself could not have felt that more keenly than I did—and barely what my heart dictated; and, though my listener never once broke her silence, I think I succeeded, in a certain way, in preventing any cloud settling down upon his memory between us, and so it answered its purpose, and perhaps another day it will be easier to me. I will hope so, for, indeed, it was rather hard to-day all through that wearisome walk across the heath. After that, and the enforced cheerfulness of our late tea, it was as much to escape from the sound of my own exerted voice, as from the sight of Mary's restlessness, that I went into the garden alone, and

myself, and could not to-day, try as I would. Indeed, the more I tried to make them fixed and intent, the more they wandered after stray clouds on the blue fields of heaven; the more I tried to follow a certain thread, the more they stayed idiotically with a snail upon the path before me; the more I tried to concentrate them upon the solving of the problem worrying me, the more they fluttered with the shivering leaves or fell to the bubbles on the water at my feet. So when at last I heard a step behind me, I am afraid I was relieved to feel my interest awakened even in a passer-by, for I knew I could not myself be seen among the lilacs, not calculating on Mr. Gunn's acquaintance with this very retired and rigorous little seat; and his pursuing his way to it quite ignorant of anyone's presence there. I was so tired of myself, of my own voice, and of my unruly and disordered thoughts, that I immediately felt glad that I should have a new channel for them now for a little, and hear tones that were

not forced into cheerfulness, as mine had been all evening. I think one may say there are two sorts of men, those who make us talk, and those who make us listen ; Mr. Gunn is certainly one of the last, and just then it suited me to be made to listen. He sat down, in a sort of satisfied way, just as if he had come prepared to find his audience there awaiting him, and told me of his day's tasks. He told me how he had been to a little isolated farm on the edge of the moor, having heard that a poor woman living there had lost her husband a few days before ; and how, instead of her being wrapped in grief, he had found her surrounded by guests of a sociable not to say convivial turn ; how she had taken him to see her husband in his coffin, wearing his ordinary Sunday dress, great coat and hat, and carrying his walking-stick ; and how one of the guests, who had followed, asked him gravely, ' Where do ee think he's for then, pa'son ?'

Then he told me how Miss Brock had been narrating to him this man's conversion in the time when revivals were the order of the day here, and those revived were moved, as Angerona said, to become at once Joined Methodists. He was the only one converted that night, she said,

solemnly and sadly :—

‘I do only wish to remind the Almighty that ’tis a quarter to nine o’clock, and that if we’re to have a revival here to-night ’tis time to see about it.’

I do not think I laughed at this reminiscence of Miss Brock’s, but I was grateful for having my thoughts turned from their cruel, bad suspicion, and I listened in lazy gratitude. Presently Mr. Gunn’s voice grew different. It lost its breezy merriment, and was stirred wholly by that under-current of earnestness which in reality never seems absent from it, and he talked to me of his past life, until—well, until, in some curious way, it seemed to me that I must have known him in that past life he spoke of. One thing he told me I recall with a ridiculous and nameless pleasure to-night. It was of his entering on his first living. He was very young, but looked far younger even than he was, and the men of his new parish—turbulent, opinionated mill-hands—rebelled against the idea of accepting from their

bishop such a boyish teacher, determining they would go to his first service and show him unmistakeably afterwards what such a lad was to expect from them. He heard of this, but was not dismayed. On the Sunday morning the church was crowded with rough fellows, ready to have no mercy in their thoughts upon the young preacher who dared attempt such a task as guiding them. But, strong in the knowledge how little he himself was the real teacher, he rose, and, looking down upon the hard and discontented faces, read his text—


‘There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes.’

He was the lad, and had carried the loaves and fishes—only that. It was not he who could bless what he brought, and make it satisfy the multitude. It was not he who was to give it them from his hands. He was only there in the crowd with the bread, waiting; for the Master, knowing they were faint, would bless it and feed them. This he told me very simply; yet I am sure I know how he could say it more than simply, and though he told me nothing of the hard faces relaxing—as I could fancy—he did tell me that never after that was his boyish face a subject of complaint. ‘Nor,’ he said, ‘did I

stupidly silent after this story, and he will never again think it worth while to tell me any incident of his past. Fortunately, Mary came up to us presently, and then between those two there was a little bright and sensible talk, she redeeming our women's character in his eyes after my stupidity. We were all surprised at last when we found how late it was, and Mr. Gunn apologised for detaining us, laughing as we separated, and quoting something that sounded like 'And so, as old Pepys said, to bed;' but I don't at all know whether that was it.

Friday, August 5th.

Surely I know now that in the coming of that dreadful storm lay a reason for the depression there has been upon us these last two days. I saw Mary struggle against it, in her brave, reticent way, but I gave in at once, in an infirm manner peculiarly my own. All yesterday I stayed indoors, with such a heavy head-ache that positively to move was pain, and it gave me an unhealthy fancy that Mary was falling ill.



I seemed to see it in her face all the while she sympathised so tenderly with me, and in every movement while she waited on me, in that easy, quiet way of hers which is so pretty. The fancy grew, until I could have shrieked aloud in my fear; and at last, powerless to keep back my tears, I begged her to go out for a little. Seeing me really in earnest, she consented and went, smiling in upon me through the open window as she passed, with a frank, bright, unsuspecting smile which made me loathe myself, and coming back far fairer and prettier herself than the sweet hedge-roses that she brought me. And yet—and yet my doubting eyes unkindly shunned the lovely face, for they always seem to see there now the unuttered sorrow Denis saw three years ago. I was glad to go early to my room—following Mary's advice—though I knew I could not win the rest she prescribed for me, while this merciless suspicion warred with my love for her, and while the love will not grow less.

My head-ache was not gone this morning, but I rose and tried to forget it. I see now how natural it was while that great storm was gathering in the air. We went out together, and had one of our slow, far wanderings, staying for

her remarks, he said, in his sententious Devon way, 'Found out all? Not they, 'less they can tell ee the woman that's in it,' I thought the burning red of my face would have killed our friendship for ever; but Mary never saw it. She was looking far away, gravely pondering, and, when we started on again, she only said,

'Barry, if you don't mind, we will go back past the Belvidere.'

I did mind, but still I had been, in a way, expecting this for days, and so made up my mind to it, glad at the same time that we had not the key, and so could not enter, even if Mary should take that desire.

'Perhaps there may be a little breeze up on the height,' I said, as a feeble source of consolation, when we turned from the hot road. 'Did you ever know the air so still and oppressive before?'

'No,' said Mary. 'It is little wonder that your head aches, Barry. The atmosphere presses upon us like a tangible burden.'

But as we ascended we saw the whole face of the sky change and darken. It had been one wide expanse of burning blue, but now from the south rose dense folds of cloud, and wrapped the entire firmament. I would not have believed such a rapid change possible. Presently out from the inky clouds flashed a wild dart of fire, and from the hills far off a deafening peal rolled past us, seeming to rend the ground on which we stood. Then the rain poured straight and suddenly down upon us, while we ran up to the tower that we might stand against its wall, and so be sheltered, partially, at any rate. It was indeed only a very partial shelter, but we stood close against the locked door, and close to each other; I frightened a little, but ashamed of my fear, while Mary stood with wide, sad eyes watching the storm. At first she spoke to me now and then, but was silent presently, only breathing quickly when the blue lightning stroke came flying more vividly over the woods, and swallowed us in a more fierce and awful light; or the thunder-claps seemed more mightily to shake the tower against which we stood. We could not see the river, as the tower was between us and it, but we heard its angry water beaten by the great hail-stones

that I saw aright, Denis Vesey come running up the slope, carrying something under his loose, long macintosh. I felt the start Mary gave when I pointed him out to her, but I do not think I wondered over it.

‘Come quickly, please,’ he called to us ; not joining us, but pausing a dozen yards away, and unfolding the cloaks he had brought for us, so obliging us to leave our questionable security and join him.

‘Had you not brought the key? I am very glad ; now we will go quickly back,’ he said to Mary, as he put her long, blue waterproof about her.

‘Wrap up Barbara,’ Mary said, but he only smiled at me, and, taking her hat from her, put on the blue hood with its deep collar, making her independent of the rain—he had evidently sought instruction from Silla, and did her credit. Then he wished to help me, but I had already buttoned on my cloak and turned the cape up over my head, so we were ready. Just as we turned to go there was one appalling flash,

a shock as if the ground were opening beneath our feet; a rumble and crash, utterly indescribable; and when I uncovered my frightened eyes I knew the lightning had struck the Belvidere; broken every pane of glass, and forcing its way out under the locked door, had shattered into fragments the stone step on which we had so long been standing. In the moment of panic, Mary had turned to Denis, taking his wet hand tightly between both her own; and in her gratitude, when she saw the death we had escaped, she held it still; standing motionless, looking up from the shattered building to the dark sky. I think now that she did not know she had held him, either in the shock or in the relief, but I thought then how strange it was, and how impossible that, by any words of hers, she could ever undo that one free and spontaneous betrayal of utter trust in him.

It never struck me, until Denis had entered the Ladyhouse with us, and I looked at him as he stood without his hat, that he had come back to us for some most earnest purpose. I saw it in his tender, sympathetic manner, and in his grave and anxious scrutiny of Mary.

‘I will only disturb you a few minutes, Miss Keveene,’ he said. He had gone up to the win-

... was staying there, when I read in the London papers something which brought me on to you.'

Not by a word did Mary question him when he paused; but to me—sitting back in the shadow watching her—her eyes, lifted with such sudden trouble to his, questioned him without the utterance of a word.

'Yes,' he said, answering the glance, 'it is about your lover.' Denis spoke in what seemed an abrupt and cruel way, but perhaps his own distress made it sound so to me, who know so little of men's suffering.

'Of whom?' she whispered, growing white to the very lips, in her startled surprise, of course, at this so suddenly betrayed knowledge of his.

'Of your lover,' he repeated, but far less steadily. 'You did not tell me—why should you trust me so far?—but I saw. Forgive me for having startled you; but, indeed, I thought it best. Perhaps I only thought it best for myself, for I am a—selfish fool. Forgive me.'

‘Will you tell me,’ said Mary, gently, ‘what you came to tell, and of whom you speak?’

‘Of Evlyn Discombe,’ Denis said, his strong fingers grasping the back of a chair near him, as if the mental tension could be eased so. ‘From his convict cell he has sent a confession that the slaughter of George Haslam was planned deliberately, carried out warily, well considered, and of set purpose. A premeditated, wilful murder, and he gives himself up as the murderer.’

‘He cannot,’ cried Mary, as if from a breaking heart—and yet I never went to her, to take her restless hands in mine, or kiss and give her comfort.

‘Will you tell me,’ asked Denis, in a tone I had never heard from him before; a tone I could not understand, though somehow it made me feel as if his heart were breaking too, ‘why do you think he could not have done this thing?’

‘I know,’ she said, her fingers tightly locked, ‘that he who—who could win such love as—he has, could not be—a murderer.’

‘I think you are right,’ said Denis, with an awful stiffness on his face, as he strove to hide all feeling save his kind compassion for her, ‘I think you are right, though I do not understand

and eyes.

‘Yes, I can believe that,’ he said ; and I know I was a hundred miles from guessing what this kind effort cost him. ‘If you love him, I can believe in him. If you feel his innocence, I can—believe it.’

‘It is death he seeks. He confesses falsely that he may—die, and his misery be over,’ said Mary. ‘He could not endure that prolonged punishment. You said—you told us once—Barbara and me—when we—when you showed us some convicts and spoke of them, that the protracted suffering—and humiliation—were unendurable to—to men of refinement. This herding—you called it—with hardened villains. And I said they all deserved it. *All!* How I have prayed to be forgiven my ignorant and presumptuous judgment ! Oh ! his innocence shall be proved. It only wants the proof.’

‘So hard to win,’ put in Denis, gently. ●

‘But you believe him innocent?’ she cried, looking piteously up into his face. ‘He could no

more have committed that—deliberate murder than—I could.’

‘Hush! hush!’ cried Denis, his voice shaken by actual pain, while I stepped back, almost as if her gentle hand had struck me.

‘But you believe me now? And so does Barbara’—with a wan smile for me.

‘Yes,’ he said, and the word was like a reviving touch for me. ‘And you, Barbara?’

‘Yes, I believe what Mary does,’ I answered, stupidly.

‘That is well,’ Denis said, almost in his old manly, cheery way. ‘I have more faith in a woman’s instinct than in any amount of the reasoning which you leave to us men. That was a shrewd observant fellow who said,

“Reasoning at every step he treads,
Man oft mistakes his way,”

wasn’t he? Miss Keveene’—with a change of tone—‘you will let me work with you now?’

‘No,’ said Mary, with that strange flush which seemed only to brighten her eyes and deepen the red of her lips, ‘I need no help. I may see him now. I can see him now with no iron barrier and no jailer between us. Why do

—offering him her hand in farewell, with a feverish brilliance in her mournful eyes—‘but I will forget it—for your sake. You will be so sorry now that you ever—said—you cared for me.’

‘Sorry!’ he echoed, with a moment’s rapturous longing on his face; then he laid his hand on his unsteady lips, and stilled the passionate words he had been going to say.

A few minutes afterwards he had left us, and Mary turned to me.

‘Barbara,’ she said, with a hysteric little laugh, ‘I read last night of an execution in Stafford. I gave the paper to Silla for Miss Brock. Will you ask her for it.’

‘Nonsense,’ I said, sturdily, though my heart beat with a babyish fear as I looked into Mary’s haggard eyes. ‘What do we want with newspapers two or three days old? It is stupid enough wasting our time reading them once over, and when they are fresh—as fresh, at least, as we can have them here. For pity’s sake don’t make us read them twice. Let Miss

Brock light her fires with them, and let me go and see whether she has forgotten our tea.' For I felt I must escape for a few moments, or I should be of no use to her ever again. And so I went and hastened tea, and saw that paper burnt; and then, by strenuous exertions, we passed through the evening hours almost as on other days.

Saturday, August 6th.

Hour after hour last night I lay awake, listening to Mary's step as she walked restlessly to and fro in her room, which is next to mine. When the step ceased it was broad summer daylight, and so I felt very doubtful of her having gone to rest. I suppose I must have fallen asleep after that, but it was not a usual sleep, and I awoke unrefreshed, with a vague anxiety upon me. I rose at once, for anything was easier than to lie still, under this intangible oppression. It was so early when I went downstairs that I did not like to disturb Miss Brock or her maid, and so went straight into the garden, and to that prim little seat hidden among the lilacs, thirstily drinking the fresh, strong morning air. I recalled all Mr. Gunn had told me there the day before yesterday, but even then I could not succeed in

going upstairs to disturb Mary or question Silla. She told me how seriously the storm of yesterday had damaged the standing crops; then enlarged feelingly on her own alarm when 'the whisht crack o' thunder shook her;' immediately afterwards calling my attention to a little glass dish of honey which she had just brought in. She wished all her lodgers to have their 'dowry,' she said, of her own honey, and that was ours, if we pleased. She was sure Miss Keveene would relish it after her walk.

I hope I thanked her, but I only recollect inquiring if Miss Keveene were really out.

'Lor,' yes, miss,' Angerona said. 'She did go an hour ago, straight to the Belvidere, for I myself gave her the key. 'Tis a pity she's not in now, but I won't spoil the rashers by being puncshal.'

Taking my hat, I started off to follow Mary, but I met one little hindrance. At the open door of Mr. Gunn's parlour, his eldest son stood looking out with a watchful anxiety.

‘Nap’s ett John’s honey,’ he observed to me, without introduction or further comment.

‘Oh, but I daresay,’ replied I, at hazard, swayed both by haste and incapacity, ‘the honey was meant for you little ones.’

‘No,’ he asserted, with pious conscientiousness, “we’d ett ours, and this was John’s, and John’s out, and Nap’s ett it.’

‘Oh! Nap,’ said I, most unwillingly drawn in to reprove so glaring a misdemeanour, ‘how could you?’

‘I smelled it,’ explained Nap, with touching brevity, lifting a serene glance to me from his big black eyes.

‘But it’s gone,’ urged Trot, with sweet persistence, ‘and Nap goned it.’

In terror lest I should have to examine into this state of affairs—for I felt an excruciating certainty that the honey in question had not been visible since Nap smelled it—and, shrinking from the indignity of remaining inactive in presence of Trot’s saintly sense of justice, I ignominiously and hastily beat a retreat.

The morning was such a contrast to yesterday. A fresh, strong wind shook the reluctant trees, and hurried the clouds along to where, on the far horizon, the sky was one broad sweep

walking slowly up and down before it. And it was during those few minutes before I reached her that I quite decided in my mind to tell her all I knew. There should be—I told myself resolutely—no longer this vague mist of suspicion and mystery between us. I would tell her not only of the photograph, but also of Denis's remembrance of meeting her, three years ago, below this very tower on the evening the murder was committed. I would tell all, and, if she must hate me for what I said, even that would be better than this hatred of myself which was growing upon me in my secrecy. I think now that what so suddenly moved me to this determination was the consciousness—brought forcibly before me, as I saw the utter hopelessness of Mary's restless movements and troubled aspect—of some great mystery puzzling and paining her, too; but I did not stop then to wonder what had urged me to the decision. I only made it, firm beyond all unmaking, in that moment. All through my walk,

I had intended first to ask her, as casually as I might, why she had come out so early, and without me—or something which should sound unconcerned and natural, and take all seriousness from the fact of my having followed her—but, when I found her, that intention went out of my head. I only knew that I must now lift—by my own painful words—this cloud of suspicion and secrecy between us.

But she did not wait for me to speak. She seized my hand in a tight, feverish clasp, standing half turned from me, and looking down among the trees.

‘It is coming back to me, Barbara,’ she said. ‘It was a dream that brought it back, and helped me last night. Or I saw—the dead.’

‘Mary dear,’ I whispered, touching her lips with mine, though she was turned away—for that brave little gasp in her quiet voice was terrible to me—‘I have a story to tell you, and it may rest you to hear it. Let us walk home, that I may tell you there.’

‘No! no!’ she said, ‘I must go in here. I can bear it now you are come. Yours is an innocent, happy story, and can wait. Oh! my dear, that I should feel so stricken in your sight!’

‘I am almost inclined,’ I said, looking away

thing though, Mary, please to remember for my sake. You know I have told you how I disbelieve and despise and abhor dreams, so I shall be hard upon them. Don't forget, dear.'

'It was no dream, I think,' said Mary, pushing her hair from her forehead with the hand I did not hold. 'I do not think I slept at all.'

'Oh! yes, you did. Even during our worst nights we sleep a little now and then, though we may not be aware of it,' I said, in my matter-of-fact way, as we mounted the few shallow steps. 'Mary, are you so tired, dear? I never before heard you pant in mounting any height, or any number of steps. I hate this place. I shall not tell you what I meant to tell you until we are back in our own snug room, and have had a good breakfast, with our "dowry" of Angerona's honey.'

No one knows how long I might have gone on in this feebly would-be-cheerful strain, but that Mary herself stopped me, drawing her hand

from my arm, and closing the book-lined door of the little room upon us.

‘Barbara,’ she said, standing back, and gazing vaguely at the shelves, ‘look on the upper one. Are the books there volumes of “State Trials”?’

‘Yes,’ said I; and I do not think I failed utterly in speaking in my usual voice.

‘There is a fourth volume?’ she said, presently, leaning against the little shattered window opposite the shelves, and speaking in a strange, clear whisper.

‘Yes.’

‘Will you—open it?’

‘Certainly,’ I said; ‘but won’t it be rather dry reading before breakfast? You must not forget, Mary dear, that I am not at all a reading person, and I really feel the want of breakfast’—but this time my little ruse was unavailing.

‘Will you,’ said Mary, with evidently no appreciation of my difficulty over that speech, ‘open it—at—page ninety-two?’

‘Hadn’t I better pass it over to you?’ I asked, as I sought the right volume, while yet my heart was beating as I never felt it beat before.

‘Page ninety-two,’ repeated Mary, facing me, with a sort of desolate look in her eyes. ‘Will you find it, Barbara? I cannot.’

with close writing.'

'Yes,' said Mary, and the hand she held out to me trembled worse than mine. But just as I was going to lay the paper in it, she started back, locking her fingers together, and lifting them so for a moment to her pale lips. 'No! No, I cannot,' she breathed, passionately, yet in a very whisper. 'I cannot. I dare—not read it. Barbara, hold it. But—do not read to me, until I have—told you—the sorrow of my life.'

Meeting that desolate look in her eyes, I tried to prevent her telling me anything, but she lifted one hand pleadingly: 'You cannot understand,' she said. 'No one could, whose heart has not been bound up all through life in one other heart. No one! It is—terrible. At least, since then I've felt it to be terrible—and pitiful. You have heard me pity those who are devoted to each other. But *then*—— Ah! well, it was happiness *then*, and had been happiness for twenty years. For we were the same age, Barbara; born on the same day, and—I think we had seemed to have the same thoughts and feel-

ings as we had the same face—why do you start? Am I more cold and ungrateful to you even than you thought, never before to have told you I had a twin sister. Oh! Barbara, you would forgive me if you knew how speaking of it—this moment—brings back all the old suffering. I *am* cold and ungrateful and mistrustful—no one knows it more sadly than myself!—but in those days, when I had my darling, loving me, hoping with me, working with me, I believe I did not understand what suspicion meant. We thought the world such a warm, loving, happy place! We thought all men were good, and just, and generous; and that all women's lives were glad, and bright, and busy. Dear heaven, how different it was for us! Don't look so sorry for me, dear. I will try to tell you quickly. The uncle we lived with was quite poor; but what was poverty to us when he was good and patient with us, when all our hours were filled with study that we loved, or leisure that we prized and made precious to each other? He died just as we were growing into womanhood, and all he had died with him; but he had always warned us it would be so, and we were not dismayed. Then an old friend of his offered to either of us the post of

never to separate.

‘We had a relative—my mother’s half-sister—who had married a very rich man, and lived in Cork. She came to us at this time and—tried to separate us, because Helen was beautiful, and she would have taken her to be an adopted daughter.

‘Barbara, I hid all my fear. I pretended I shouldn’t be lonely; and I seemed as if I hadn’t a single doubt about my darling accepting this offer, which our aunt said would be so greatly to her advantage; yet, while I thought it possible, all the future looked black as ink to me. But she laughed—O, Barbara, her laughter was the music of my life!—and would not leave me. Then—then I knew what it was to be so utterly content as to want no other thing on earth, and from that hour our happiness seemed to grow—perfect, as we had always thought it, while we had each other—until——

‘It was a very busy life we led, for we had teaching besides our school, and Helen played the organ in the church, and taught the choir; but


we had holiday leisure now and then ; and, Barbara, I can never tell you what our holidays were to us.

‘ It was in the autumn, nearly four years ago, when one day a gentleman looked into the church while Helen was practising, I standing waiting for her, for always, when I could not go with her, she would wait for me to join her there, that we might have the walk home together. He spoke to us about the church and the neighbourhood, saying he was only passing through the valley on a walking tour to Killarney ; but next day he had taken rooms at the village inn, and not only Helen and I, but all the village, soon might have been aware why he stayed. O, Barbara, how he loved her ! It was a fresh, open, boyish love, yet somehow its earnestness was almost painful. His love not only seemed all he had in the world to think of, or build upon, but all he wished to have. Do you understand ? To me Helen had always been most beautiful, but now I saw that to all others she was growing lovely exceedingly in this new joy and sweetness of life. In the great gladness which her love made for her she held me always ; Evlyn’s love for her never separated us ; her love for him never shut me from her. It was only by strata-

* * *

when Helen sang about our cottage as if her heart would burst with joy if it kept silence ; and when my heart was light as air in its supreme content ; and the hours—the busy and the idle ones—fled by as minutes.

‘ It was quite winter when Evelyn Ashton—*Eva*, Helen always called him in her merry way—went away at last, to return in Spring, but every day his letters came, and before the spring had fairly reached us he was back. But her trust in him had been so perfect that his presence scarce could make her happier—at least it would seem not to anyone who loved her less entirely than I. One day—I remember it was a dreamy, still, May afternoon—Evelyn came to the cottage to bid us good-bye, for a little time, he said. He was summoned to England on business which he could not postpone, nor could he explain it—so he frankly told us—until his return, which would not be one hour unnecessarily delayed. Nor should he write, he said ; praying Helen to trust him in his silence.



‘Trust him! Indeed, indeed she did. I bade him good-bye and left them, trembling a little after I had heard him go, for fear of meeting a sad look on Helen’s face. But she ran to seek me, and kissed me, and led me out, as if it were I who needed comfort, not she, who knew so well his love was hers! Barbara, what can I tell you—next? He had been gone some weeks when my aunt wrote again to Helen. She had done so many times, reiterating the old inducement that Helen should live as a lady if she would go to her; and as I had seen all those letters, and had a few moments’ pang over the allurements offered my darling, before her merry rejection of them, I was glad that now at last she forbore to show me one. But this new trait of Helen’s was followed by a great shock to me.

‘I taught alone that morning, and when I entered the cottage after school hours—feeling still upon my lips the long kiss she had given me when we separated after breakfast, and wondering that I heard no glad voice singing, no light step moving in the cottage rooms—my heart sank even before thought had had time to frame itself. Barbara, instead of her dear welcome, there were a few hurried lines written to

to go. So she had given me a farewell kiss that morning, she said, and there was a loving little prayer for God to bless me till she came back to me, in only a few days' time.

‘In only a few days' time! This was my comfort, for—can you believe it, Barbara?—that was our first separation. I knew Helen had written the truth, and that in a few days' time she would come back to me, so I prepared for her, and thought of her, and only one week had passed when she came. Oh! Barbara, I have often and often felt that, though I have lived so long since then—a lifetime, as it were—that was the day of my real death. If some one had covered my eyes suddenly while my darling laughed and jested with me, and then uncovered them upon her dead face in its coffin, it could not have been a greater shock. I knew, in one swift flash of anguish, that all her youth and hope and happiness were dead. You cannot feel this, Barbara. It would be impossible for anyone to picture such a change. For one hour, in darkness, in the dead of night,

I wrestled with this awful agony, alone—with God. After that, I never left her—till the end. It came so soon! Oh, Barbara, think of it—think of it, and you must pity me. She was all I had on earth, I loved her with my whole heart; and my heart was like one with hers, so that I suffered all her suffering, Barbara, and my own too. Do you wonder I can never bear to love again? I knew he had killed her. Do you wonder that I hated—all men for his sake? Never once after her return to me was his name mentioned between us; I could not be the first to utter it in the face of that terrible shadow which I knew only he could have brought upon us. Every thought now of our past was like a stab in my heart. Every memory of my darling in her beauty and her joy was like seeing her—murdered; not by one swift stab, mercifully fatal, but by—torture. I knew without one word from her that he had done all this, so do you wonder that I scorn man's so-called love, for he *seemed* true and faithful. From that time I shrank in very dread from loving anyone again, and I knew that, though I might live perhaps through long, long years to come, he had killed me as surely as he had killed my darling.

watched her, powerless to help her or relieve her, heart-broken because my love, in all its great intensity, could not spare her one pang, could not give her one hour's—even one minute's—sleep or rest. Oh! those long, long, weary nights, through which the wide wakeful eyes never closed, the wan, fevered lips—the lips that always, always used to smile—moved only in a pitiful delirium.'

'Mary,' I cried, for my thoughts had held a conjecture which was strangely a relief to me, 'was your twin sister so like you that you could be mistaken?'

'Yes,' said Mary, pushing the hair from her white face, 'we were sometimes mistaken for each other. We used to put our faces together before the glass, and laugh to see the features all the same; yet my darling was far, far too pretty to be really mistaken for me.'

'I see,' I said, but could not smile even at this idea, while I looked into the lovely face that told me more than the broken sentences. 'Now, my dear, do not tell me more.'

‘Yes, please; I have a little more to tell. Oh! Barry, help me!’

‘How had it happened so quickly, so suddenly?’ I asked, uttering almost involuntarily the question that had been puzzling me.

‘I could not know. I knew she had been—killed, and had come home to me to die. No more. She told me nothing. She would lie, her eyes following me with a terrible, aching want in them, but she would never speak of any want at all. She would watch the door sometimes for hours, as if dreading the entrance of some one, but she never uttered a dread. Ah! could it be my own warm, tender, happy Nell? I used to cry. I have known no more ever since.’

‘When was it that your sister went to Cork?’ I asked, presently, with just a shy, stupid touch upon Mary’s clasped hands.

‘In June,’ she said, slowly. ‘That was three years ago last June.’

‘And can you remember whether she was absent on the twenty-seventh?’

‘Can I remember? No. I have tried and tried through these terrible days since that morning on Portland Island, when, for the first time since he bade us good-bye so hopefully in

NAME. But no, I can remember nothing of that time, save its misery, and I wrote no word that I could refer to. How could I write of that intolerable anguish? And she said so little to me, save when she was not conscious what she said. Oh! Barbara, Barbara, I knew nothing but that Helen suffered, and that I—— But—' (with her locked hands against her heaving breast) 'last night I—you will say it was a dream—I saw her, my own darling. Not as she has come to me in dreams before, her own sweet, happy, loving self, but as she came in that day, affrighted, as it seemed, and with listening eyes—Do you understand that, Barbara? Did you ever see eyes *listening*, listening always—and trembling so that I could not calm her, closely as I held her in my arms. And—she spoke again in the old broken, sad, delirious way, and said again what she had said through many restless, feverish hours. And then I seemed to understand the words, as I had failed to do before. It was of a misty, brooding day she spoke, and of the river's sound. She said it hurt her, and then she told me eagerly

to look on the upper shelf. They were all "State Trials," she said, but I should reach her the fourth volume, and I should find in it page ninety-two. Barbara, you know what we have found there? You will—read it.'

'Presently, dear,' I answered, and then told my story of the photographs, and of Denis seeing Mary herself, as he had fancied—but knowing now whom he had really seen—and while I spoke I trembled like an idiot, and kissed again and again the white, haggard face. 'Yes, I will read it when we have left this chilly place. Now come.'

She came, obedient as a child, but walked beside me so blindly and uncertainly that I put a supporting arm around the tall young figure whose ease and carriage I had so often envied.


'Yes, I am glad to come,' she said; 'it seems horrible to me here—horrible. I feel now that my darling must have *seen* that—deed. If she did, how could she have lived even to reach me? Oh, what wonder that—she died!'

My tears were pouring so childishly from my eyes that I could not answer, but I fought with them, and we reached the Ladyhouse without encountering anyone to notice our poor, miserable faces.

holding it tightly, but not looking down upon it. I would not go far away, so I sat in the porch below her open window; but for long there was so marked a silence that I felt sure Mary was pausing, scarce feeling she had strength to read what her twin sister might have written. Then suddenly, from the open window, there came through the clear air a cry which I feel must haunt me evermore. I could not keep away from her an instant longer, and without one thought, save for her suffering, I went in to her. I folded her in my arms, and kissed her, and tried to comfort her with words that were insane, I am sure, however loving, and at the time I never thought how unlike me was such an act.

‘Go away, Barbara!’ Such a wailing cry it was! ‘I must bear this alone.’ And, seeing how mournfully in earnest she was, I went.

For about an hour I bore the silence, then I felt I must go in to her again. She was sitting on the bed, her arms folded on the footrail, her face hidden on them. When she heard me at



her side, she lifted her face—such a white face, with all the hair pushed feverishly from it, and such hopeless sorrow in the beautiful eyes!

‘Barbara,’ she whispered, ‘read this.’

I took the paper, sitting down, for fear she should see how I trembled, and read what was written there—even the handwriting was exactly like Mary’s. She watched my face, falling to her knees presently beside me, as if she could see better looking up.

‘Do you understand it?’ she said at last, with a gentle little touch upon my bent head, as if I were the one who should be comforted. ‘I do—cruelly. Shall I tell you what it means?’

‘Yes,’ I said, and laid the paper down, and looked straight into her sad eyes, wondering over this strange composure and this lowliness so unlike her. Somehow I felt that it would be better for her to speak to me, but as I had understood a little I need not torture her to tell me all.

‘I see that what I thought was true. Your sister only stayed in Cork just to hear—of Mr. Discombe, and—came here. That letter of your aunt’s seems to have contained some implication against him, which she—Helen—determined to prove false.’

to Cork to deny this, and then—hearing it confirmed—she went to disprove it. She was but a girl, Barbara, and knew the world so little! She went to Westercombe, and wrote from there to Evlyn, begging him to see her, and while she waited she heard his story, as we have heard it—I mean, of course, up to that day. And if she had not,—you can see that she never believed a word against him. She only wished to—prove it, just as I have lately wished to prove his—innocence. He wrote back to her, and begged her to meet him—to meet him——’

‘Yes, yes,’ I said, soothingly. ‘To meet him in the Belvidere. I read that. He could not bear to leave his father for long enough to go to Westercombe, and he could not bear that, while his father lay unconscious and dying, and Mr. Haslam ruled at the Manor, his future wife should visit his home for the first time—and thus. That was most natural. He would have her welcomed there with honour and re-

joicing. So she was to go to the Belvidere, and he would await her there. But, if she were first, he begged her to believe he would be detained only by his father, as there might be a change in him. Yes, I read that, and that she came to Rocklands by the coach, and went to the Belvidere, and he was awaiting her. She must have reached the tower by the way we did, else Miss Brock would have seen her, though perhaps not necessarily so.'

'They must have been undisturbed for some time,' said Mary, very low, 'for Evlyn had told her all the story of his quarrel with his father; of George Haslam's hurtful influence at Rocklands; and of his recall home being left too late for him to be recognized by his father. He gave the honourable reason of his silence to her so long as his father lived; but he said he should have told her all, either if his father forgave him, or died—in any case before they married. She did not condemn or censure him. She trusted him entirely, and she was parting with him to return to me—happy once more in her perfect faith in him—when there came in to them the man who had wrought him so much injury. Barbara, Barbara,'—in a panting whisper—'read the rest.'

—for we have never had that moment's horrible temptation. There are but a few lines more, but the writing trembles so that it makes me tremble too. Lay your head down, my darling, while I read it. Your—your eyes distract me. This—is all——'


“I cannot write what this man said to Evlyn, though as long as I live I shall not forget one of the untrue, evil words or the mocking tone. Not one word did Evlyn answer, standing with my hand in his, seeing only me, with a look on his frank, dear face as if he pitied this man. But suddenly—stung, perhaps, by Evlyn's silence—the man's derision turned upon me—or upon Evlyn for my sake, I cannot understand which, though still the little room is echoing to me the false, slanderous words he uttered.

“Then Evlyn turned upon him with an awful passion, and seized him by the collar. George Haslam was by far the bigger, stronger man, and all my heart went out in prayer for peace between them. He laughed when Evlyn held him, and at the sound Evlyn took his hand

away and reached for a little pistol I had noticed before, almost like a toy, telling George Haslam to leave the tower, or he would fire. I saw it glittering in his hand, and though I wonder now how I could have feared *his* using it against a human life; and though I know that he would never, never have done so, even under the fiercest provocation; I took it from his hand.

“In a moment—in one second’s time after the pistol was in my hand—the man rushed upon Evlyn—oh! God, it was so quickly done, and my eyes saw it all! Before I could cross the room, the stronger, bigger man alone was there. He had thrown Evlyn from that open window high above the river—I heard the breaking of the wood beyond—and for a moment—or it might have been an hour—I did not know where I was. Then I knew that my beloved lay dead down there—far down in the river, and that his enemy was dead too, across the open doorway, shot at the first words he dared to speak to me, coming towards me, a smiling coward, who had thrown a brave man to his death! I do not feel as if it could have been myself who fired. I have not realised the horror of it yet, but it will come to me. Oh!

a hateful smile upon his face, and he lies there across the open doorway. I cannot pass him, but, except that horrible window above the sheer decline to the river, these windows are near the ground, and I can drop easily. I write this that some day the truth may be known. If it could free any guiltless person I would wait and tell it—even to break my sister's heart. But there is no one to suffer—save myself, and no penalty the law could give would be a sorer punishment than will be my own memory, and this my loss, and the bearing this weight of guilt and secrecy unknown to the only one in all the world who loves me now, and whose love I cannot forfeit for the little time that I can bear this load. I will remember where I put this paper, so that I may tell at last, if—no, I need not tell. Both are dead. The world will know that some one who has escaped them hated this villain for his cruelty to Evlyn, and killed him because he had



killed Evlyn first. If they seek me—if they find me in our Irish home, and——”

The hand and heart failed here. There was no other word save that, across the sheet, was written almost steadily — ‘Helen Keveene. Written in the Belvidere, Rocklands, Devon, on June the twenty-seventh, eighteen hundred and seventy-eight.’

When I had read this, there was a long silence between us ; at least, it seemed to me very long, for, try as I would, I could not break it myself. Then Mary spoke, as wearily as if this hour had aged her fifty years.

‘You see, Barbara,’ she said, but her voice had lost its old clear ring, ‘Evlyn Discombe is innocent. I have the long sought proof.’

‘Yes,’ I said, heavily, with a faint shadow upon me of what this revelation had been to Helen Keveene’s sister.

‘He will be free now, after these long, cruel years.’

‘Yes,’ said I, closing her feverish eyes with my cold hand.

‘I can take him his release.’

‘Yes,’ said I, again mechanically.

‘Helen has given him that at last.’

‘No, no,’ said Mary, hurriedly, and rose at once, and turned from me. ‘You don’t understand. Oh! Barbara, you never understood.’

‘No,’ said I, with an effort to betray nothing beyond my customary matter-of-factness. ‘I only understand that he loved you exceedingly, and that you *would* not like him, because you felt it a sort of duty to dislike all men.’

It was a lame explanation, as I knew full well, and I little expected Mary to take it so humbly and patiently as she did.

‘That old, sad, deeply-rooted certainty that my sister’s lover had killed her by his inconsistency, made me hate all men, yes,’ she said slowly, as if weighing every word. ‘But after that day in Portland I knew there was a work for me to do, perhaps a life-long task, and it was not my secret, not mine, Barbara; how could I tell him, or even you? But now’—once more, with both her palms upon her temples, she pushed the thick hair back, as if it were its weight alone oppressing her—‘the dishonour and the shame and guilt are *mine*. We were

as one, Helen and I, in our best and brightest days, and it seems as if we must have been one—Barbara, do you understand?—in that terrible guiltiness. Could the longest lifetime of loneliness and lovelessness for me wash out that crime?’

‘You have not to wash out your sister’s faults,’ I said, sturdily, though without the faintest idea whether I spoke sense or not, ‘and this is not your disgrace, Mary. Denis will know that, and oh, my dear, he loves you so!’

‘Loves me?’ she said, with a lingering softness in her voice. ‘He—loves—me? And I—Barbara’ (with one of her sudden changes of tone) ‘if in your loving compassion for me you come to me in my last illness, whether this day’s discovery kills me soon, or whether the long years have to be lived, you will see here—here, close to my heart, the spray of heath that Denis gave me on—that day. Not a valuable gift, was it? But worth to me all the world holds besides. Let it lie there, Barbara. Let it lie there upon my heart, even in my grave. It has faded, though so near my heart where the love can never fade—can never die, though hope for me has died for ever. You are true and good, my Barbara, yet I meant never to tell even you. Now, dear, let us drop his name between us.


such a death! Oh, Helen, Helen!

‘But, Mary,’ said I, quietly, for I felt quite sure that she looked upon this as our parting, ‘if I may not come with you, I shall have to follow in your steps alone, and horribly lonely I shall be. I’m an unfortunate person to travel by myself, so you will not be so cruel as to send me away from you. I shall not leave you unless you do send me, and then I shall follow you everywhere all by myself.’

‘You—will come?’ she cried, looking almost incredulously into my face. ‘Oh, my dear, my dear!’—and then the reviving tears came to her sorrowful eyes at last.

Sunday, August 7th.

To-morrow morning we leave for London, and so this is our last night here. A carriage is engaged to take us very early in to Westcombe—indeed, we should have left yesterday, but that Mary found there were no Sunday trains. She sent a mounted messenger to tele-



graph to her solicitor, and posted other telegrams, and now all our preparations are complete, and we have but to—go.

I have come up to my room to be alone a little, puzzled by my regret at leaving, because I have witnessed—and felt—so much of sorrow here. The August moon looks down from the wide far blue, while now and then a little white cloud flies before it, graceful and beautiful beyond all words. No wonder my gaze lingers on the fair silent scene, and that I am very, very glad we have had this peaceful Sunday for our last day. It has strengthened us both.

Mr. Gunn is still with Mary in the garden. I wonder whether he is astonished at that intense silence which enfolds her to-day. I suppose I must go down to them again. I wonder what they think I came away for—if they think at all of my coming. I tried to be cheerful in the garden with them. Indeed, when he joined us, I received him with quite a gay and unrestrained remark about the harvest moon.

‘Is it the harvest moon, Mr. Gunn?’ asked Mary, with a great effort to break through her own abstraction. ‘I thought September’s was the harvest moon.’

‘In Spain,’ he said, without directly answer-

then went away and gathered a handful of mignonette and nasturtium to take with me as a memento of this time—I mean of the cottage and the garden. I wonder how nasturtiums will press, but it does not signify; they will remind me just the same.

I will go back now, yet I dread the good-bye. How ridiculous to dread a good-bye to some one simply because we have lived in the same lodgings for a few days!

I found them in the garden still, but when I saw how tired Mary looked I tempted her in, though the summer night was beautiful to me.

‘Good night and good-bye, Mr. Gunn,’ she said, giving him one hand, and with the other taking mine. ‘Thank you very much for the kind help you have given me in your words, and the still kinder help you have offered to give me in other ways; but I—have Barbara.’

He looked at us both for a moment, then looked away, while a nonsensical lump rose in my throat.

‘She has no help from me,’ I said, spasmodically, ‘though she always pretends she has—just to please me, because she is generous. I would help her though, if I could.’

‘Yes,’ he said, quietly, and took the hand I gave him; his hand-clasp, always so real and sincere, saying good-bye without a word, and in its full and sacred meaning, too.

That is over now, and there is only Miss Brock to part from in the early morning. Even she seems fretting to lose Mary, for she has been very touchy with me all day, and came home from chapel suspiciously early this evening, telling us ‘the preachin’ didn’t fit her; ’twas nought but a timid utterance.’

Monday, August 8th.

At Westercombe this morning we met Denis. We had been driven so fast, at Mary’s instigation, that we arrived quite early at the station, and soon afterwards Denis entered it. I grew suddenly anxious about Silla and our luggage, and left him with Mary, but I was even sorry I had done so—how seldom I do anything I am not afterwards sorry for!—when he fetched me, our time being up, for he looked quite changed and ill, and when I questioned him he answered me almost impatiently, that he was not leaving:

alone, anxiously and courteously saw that we had all we wanted, and bade us good-bye, waiting until the train left. Then I looked at Mary.

‘Barry,’ she said, answering the glance, ‘he was very kind and—patient, but he knows now that I can never be more to him than a stranger. I told him so; earnestly, as if they were my dying words.’

‘Does he know?’ I questioned, understanding what this interview had been to her.

‘He knows only that I cannot be his wife—not even his friend, for I could not trust myself—and he will never ask me again. He has promised.’

Tuesday, August 9th.

I wrote those few words about meeting Denis at Westercombe, on our arrival yesterday, but no more. I ought to have added that Mary’s solicitor, Mr. France, met us, had already himself seen the Home Secretary, and assured us that the preliminary steps towards Evlyn Discombe’s discharge were taken. He had acted

most promptly and kindly, as Mary said, but she herself will have much to do legally—I mean officially. I suppose I was too tired to write this, or that my thoughts were too much harassed by the certainty that this liberty must be terribly overshadowed for Helen Keveene's lover.

I forgot to say that Mr. France had telegraphed to the Isle of Wight, where Ernest Discombe is reading with a coach, and to-day he goes down for an interview with Evlyn. Mary seems greatly troubled as to how Mr. Discombe will bear the shock, almost wishing she could go herself to break it to him, but no words can tell how glad I am that she cannot.

‘Oh, it will be all right,’ Mr. France said, actually laughing. ‘The shock will be too grateful a one for us to fear its effect.’

‘Could it not be?’ I began, halting painfully. ‘Was it not possible that he need know only that he was freed by the confession of the really guilty—of another person? Need he ever know who it was?’ But Mary looked so sad over this, and Mr. France so kindly made me feel myself an idiot, that I said no more. Mr. France has had a letter from Ernest Discombe, who is now on his way up. His great wish, it seems,

was to be the boy's guardian, and his death, before the testator's, leaves Ernest in his brother's care, and he can occupy the place of honour at present if the lad will. He certainly will if he has his desire, but in my own mind I doubt the success of that going-home-with-rejoicing business.'

Mr. France has promised to come straight to us on his return from Portland, and meanwhile we get through the hours as best we can, weakly trying to amuse and mislead each other into the belief that everything is very nice and satisfactory now.

Wednesday, August 10th.

This evening Mr. France returned, but gave us merely the bare outlines of his visit to Portland. He was not hopeful, as he had been when he left us yesterday, and I thought there must be some hitch in the proceedings. But I could not glean that there was, and Mary did not seem aware of any change in Mr. France. Probably, in her highly-wrought nervous condition,

it seems natural to her for everyone to feel grave and depressed, because a man has for three years undergone an unmerited punishment.

Friday, August 12th.

Mr. France came in unexpectedly early, and, as Mary happened to be in her own room, I saw him alone for a few minutes, when he seemed glad to speak unreservedly to me. Evelyn Discombe was virtually discharged, he said, from his undeserved imprisonment, was a free man, and would be in all men's sight an innocent one; but there was no disguising the fact that he was in a very precarious state of health, and Mr. France begged me to assist him in breaking this fact to his client. In my cowardly fashion, I begged for a reprieve. Before she saw him there might be a change, I urged. Freedom might give him back almost at once his look of health. Surely we need not prepare her unnecessarily. Mr. France gave in to me, though dubiously; so we are not to tell Mary. My weak mind seizes with relief upon even the smallest respite.

Thursday, August 25th. Weymouth.

For how many days have I forgotten my diary? If I looked back now, how like a

him, and was to bring him at last his freedom !

His freedom !

I think—I do not know how to say it even in my thoughts, much less to write it ; but I think his freedom had been sent to him before that summer morning, and is very near now.

I try not to think this. I try with all my might and main, but how can one put a thought away when it is in every face around one ? We are all in Weymouth again. My mother and sisters had not left, and so when it was decided that Mr. Discombe should travel no further, and Mary was eager to be where he was, mother invited her to come with me. She was most pathetically grateful.

‘ It is so kind,’ she said, again and again, until the tears actually came into mother’s eyes, and Selina told me afterwards that she should not have known Mary Keveene for the proud, cold, cynical beauty of only a month ago. My poor, poor Mary ! That to her own sorrow and loneliness and humiliation should be added this

anguish of seeing that her sister's terrible, unpremeditated crime should have killed the man who loved her, and who for three years had endured silently for her sin! For that his freedom will not bring him health, we know, alas! too well.

His brother is devoted to him; Mary would only too gladly give her life to save his; but of what avail are all our longings and efforts and devotion when—but, as I say to myself, again and again, it is only that a Friend, far more loving and tender and pitiful even than the one who has tried so hard to help him, or than anyone of us who try so hard to keep him, has sent to summon him to a liberty where the old pain can never touch him more. I believe it was a great shock when Mary went to him first after our arrival here. He had not heard of her sister's death, and in the first moment he mistook her for Helen. I noticed she had put on a very simple dress, and I guessed it was one she had worn in the old happy days in Ireland, when the twin sisters dressed alike, and perhaps this helped the delusion. She was sorry afterwards, I know, for she had never imagined that result, and has dressed quite differently since; always quietly and humbly—if one may say so

it. Only once in my presence has she alluded to that solitary and laborious life he has lived, and even then he tried to turn her sad, regretful words aside, and cheer her with memories of the old happy time in Ireland.

‘From the moment that—after those doubting years—I saw you, Evlyn,’ she said, ‘I sought the truth. With certain instinct of your innocence, I pursued it.’

‘To your own sorrow, dear. Now speak of something else.’

‘Not yet—please,’ she entreated. ‘You never blame her, and you let me tell you how she suffered, but——’

‘We can feel how she expiated all in such sad suffering,’ he gently said. ‘No, how could I blame her? It was only one moment of temptation. Another moment of thought, and she would have acted differently. If his words were maddening to me, Mary, think what they were to her—afterwards, and when she thought I was killed by him—my poor, poor darling!’

How happy you have made me by telling me she thought me dead. She never knew of the punishment given me—I felt that always, yet it is good to hear it. She would have died to spare me, now I know it ;’ and by the brightening of the wan face I saw how that consciousness of her absence and silence had told most of all upon him through those long years. ‘She saw me killed, as she thought,’ he reiterated, still with that touching, nameless gladness on his face, ‘and for a moment she was not herself—to know it bitterly afterwards. It was—enough to kill her.’

‘It did kill her. The loss of you and the bearing of that guilty secret killed her so soon—so long ago.’

‘Is it selfish to be so glad?’ he murmured, and then was silent, looking far off where sea and sky so softly met.

‘Evlyn, how you must have wondered over our silence, and our not appearing—you know what I mean.’

‘At my trial,’ he answered, calmly. ‘No, I thought her safe with you. You did not know me as Discombe, and I hoped you would not—and I prayed she might not—see the papers. She would have blamed herself,’ he added,

might bear the punishment of it, for I should have committed it, but for her. I ought to have borne it, Mary, to the end, but I grew weak, and tired, and cowardly. A life-time seemed so endless. Death looked so much easier; even—any death.’

‘It was my horrible fear of that which made—memory come back to me.’

‘But now how different it has made me feel to see you once again, dear sister, and to feel she would have—— She wrote that to save anyone, and would have stayed and saved me, only she thought me dead—both of us dead. Who was there to save? Oh, Mary! to think how every day she may have been expecting to be found and—captured!’

‘If she had but told me,’ breathed Mary; and I could even see how she trembled, while he was perfectly calm.

Then, while I sat pondering on that momentary madness of passion which had cost them both so much—cost them their lives, as I knew

now ; how could I help but know it ?—he, smiling, held out his hand to me to come nearer to them in the window (Mary must have quite misrepresented me to him, for he treats me just as if I had been doing as much as she has for his sake), and talked of their old days in Ireland, explaining things to me as if I had known them then, but might have forgotten some of the places or people. Oh me, it was so brightly done, and yet—I feel that he spoke only the truth to-day, when, watching a few leaves fall in the gardens, where he may only sit during the mid-day sunshine, he said it was peace to him to know that he was dying with the dying summer.

Monday, September 5th.

I seldom remember my diary now. With the pitiful restlessness of an invalid, Evlyn Discombe seems to have set his heart upon returning to his old home ; but day after day they wait for him to be better before he attempts the journey. His young brother stays always with him, but Denis is now his best companion, and is devoted to him in such an easy, protecting, manly way that no wonder Mary's gratitude, as she hides it from him, must sometimes be poured out so pite-

would say it—sweet as are her care and affection to him. For who could be like Denis to him now? So gentle, so brotherly, so patient, and yet so strong, and so cheery, and so wise. This evening Denis was summoned to London on professional business, and we all miss him more than we confess to each other. I, just as I have always missed his kind good presence, but Mary with a strange restless defiance of her consciousness of this. She always, when she can, avoids Denis, and she never looks at him, nor seems to see his eyes rest upon her—that they do continually and sadly I know only too well—and though for his kindness to Mr. Discombe she will not always leave him even when she might, I see that she always feels as if they two were very far apart.

To-day Ernest has been telling his brother—we two sat working in the window near his couch—of how wisely and strongly Denis had written on that one crying evil which he always saw in our convict system (the promiscuous

mingling of the prisoners) and of how hopeful he is of its being amended.

‘He writes with no weak sentiment,’ the boy said, warmly, ‘but with a sympathy and thoughtfulness which are intensely powerful.’

‘Then,’ said Evlyn, gently, ‘I will thank him.’ And I saw a beautiful unusual flush in Mary’s white cheeks. To my astonishment, Evlyn—after speaking of this reform which Denis strives to forward—spoke for the first time voluntarily of his own prison life.

‘One could not fancy,’ he said, with a shiver, ‘even the most barbarous and savage tribe using such appalling language as was around me; such oaths; such—ribald blasphemy; and I could not close my ears to it, try as I would. It was in my hearing night and day, not only when I was among the others, but even pressed upon me through the walls of my cell; sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other, and the cell was but four feet wide. Where could I go from it? How could I help the horror of learning the evil taught me, while—I suppose I had been placed there to be cured of my own wickedness.’

‘But you could read,’ suggested Ernest, his boyish lips set firmly in his distress.

bribe the men to disobey their orders. I seemed to have lost all links with the outer world.'

'Oh! Evlyn, and this was to last your lifetime!'

'But did not,' said the elder brother, with a patient smile. 'How one is mistaken! I never thought I should live through the nine months' probation before going to Portland—indeed, I felt as if that one horrible journey, handcuffed in the prison van, from Newgate to Brixton, would kill me—and yet I lived to be free.'

I suppose we were very remiss to let him speak of this, even for so short a time (I am sure Denis would not have done so), for later on his sleep was wild and troubled, and with aching hearts we listened to the broken words that told us how the old miserable life held him in its grip once more. Again and again Mary roused him, but it was only a minute before the sad unconsciousness grasped him again, and we knew this was not a natural sleep, from which

we could awake him to the different scene. It must have its way, we saw. Now and then he talked fast and unintelligibly, moving his arms regularly and heavily, and we saw he thought he used his heavy pick upon the stone. Then he cried sharply that the coast was inaccessible ; then bade us watch the red light on the break-water, telling us that when it paled we could be sheltered there, just as the ships were sheltered. Then he whispered gently, and I knew he was whispering to his old love, before I heard him tell her he always saw her just as she sat that afternoon playing the organ in the little church. And then he laughed, and said he had laughed more in that one day, with her and Mary, than in all his life before. Oh, it was very pitiful ! Most so for the lad, who went away unable to bear this ; and for Mary, sitting with her eyes upon his thin flushed face, and her fingers tightly locked ; but it was pitiful even to me.

Wednesday, September 7th.

To-day Denis came back. I had been reading aloud to Evlyn, in the quiet inner sitting-room where he generally lies. He says he likes me to read to him, of course, because he sees how anxious I am to be of a little

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Denis's love for Mary, I could not help telling the truth—Evlyn must have won me to it by his tender affection for Helen's sister, and his gratitude to Denis. I told him of her love, and how she felt too much abased to ever let him know it, and had won from him a promise that he never again would ask her for it. I told him all this, though indeed I think he understood it almost as well as I did, so anxiously had he watched her lately. Soon afterwards Denis came in, and I knew quite well that Evlyn would tell him, at least I felt sure that Denis would be made to comprehend.

I went into the outer sitting-room and joined Mary. Mother and Reby had persuaded Ernest to have a walk with them, for the boy looks very pale, and he had gone the less unwillingly as he wished to meet a certain train which was bringing grapes for Evlyn. Mary was writing at the centre table, and I sat down at the window. I had no other room to go to, else I should have left her, fancying it would be better that, when Denis came in, he might speak to her

alone if he wished. We are all far more at home now in these large quiet rooms, which mother herself had taken for the invalid, than in our own. Mary wrote on and on, until at last we heard Denis's footstep cross the inner sitting-room, and then she looked up from the paper, and seemed waiting, even before he had opened the door between the two rooms. I believe she had forgotten my presence, and I never can doubt that in her heart—so near to his—she understood it all, and knew that he was coming to her differently from what he had ever come before.

Her eyes were fixed upon the door before he opened it, and when he entered it seemed as if she could not take her eyes from his face—such a changed face, so tender, so glad, so confident ! Even I could scarcely recognise the Denis I had held first in my heart for so many years.

He came up to Mary and paused beside her, looking down into her eyes, and holding out both his hands. Quietly—it seemed almost unconsciously—she laid down her pen, still never looking away from his face, and put her hands into his—not gently only, but with childish shyness. He waited while she raised her face still higher, slowly ; until her eyes—so fully meeting

his—had read the great desire and longing there. Then a wonderful pathetic gladness irradiated hers.

‘Oh! Denis, can it be that you forgive me?’

‘Mary—my own Mary, I have heard all, and it is I who am unworthy—not you, my soul’s beloved.’

‘I have suffered, Denis, and not least in my—great love—for you.’

‘But you will not let it be so any longer?’ he cried, unable to suppress his great emotion. ‘If you had only told me all at first—my poor, brave darling. How can I make you understand? Release me from that wretched promise not to tell you of my love again?’

‘No,’ she said, very humbly. ‘You will keep your promise; you are too honourable to break it. Denis, is not my name disgraced and dishonoured in your sight?’

‘Indeed, it is not. It is even more precious to me than before. But I do not want your name; I want to give you mine.’

‘It does not humble you in your own sight to—care for me?’

‘If not?’ he questioned; his eyes answering that, as even words could scarcely do.

‘If not,’ she said, in low, shy tones, ‘it makes

me proud to care for you. It has made me proud—always—hopeless as I was.’

‘My love,’ he cried, his chest heaving as he laid her head against it, ‘through all my heart let me feel the truth of this. I did not break my promise, did I?’

‘No,’ she said, gently. ‘It was I who—offered you my love.’

‘And you know now, my dearest,’ he said, lifting her face after what seemed a long silence, ‘*who* “loved one only and who clave to her”?’

‘And you know now, Denis,’ she said, not smiling, but raising warm, sweet eyes to his, ‘*who* “loves her lord above everything.” Oh, Denis, how I loved you even on that far-off day, when we jested so!’ Then there broke from her tremulous lips a tearless little sob, but I could not sorrow, for it was surely her supreme content breaking through these sad recollections.

As for me, I sat crying silently at the window. Some women are so idiotic, they cry in the very times when they ought to be most grateful. I did my best, too, trying to cheer myself up with the thought that she would have better remembrances of Denis now than that dead bit of heath.

anxiety for Evelyn so unintermittent. And to see his content so deeply rooted, seeming perfect now that he knows all will be well with Helen's sister. As for Denis, I am quite certain now that I could never all my life have had the faintest notion what Denis could be, unless I had been, as I so happily have, a friend of Mary's.

Oh me, what love can give into our hearts sometimes !

I wonder why I am thinking so much to-day of our Sundays at Rocklands. What peaceful days they were, in spite of their overlying sorrow, and anxiety, and—secrecy. At least I think now that they were; but perhaps all days are so when we look back upon them. Of course a great cloud did overshadow those, in Mary's sorrow and my own suspicion, yet I see them lie quite fair in the far past—it seems far to me. How could I ever have mistrusted Mary? I think that day by day I love her more. In her love for Denis, as in her care for Evelyn, and as in the old anxiety, she never forgets me; never for one minute lets me feel less her friend and

her companion, or less loved by her. Of course it is only a fancy of mine, but I wish Mr. Gunn were as near to Evlyn, as he would be were the brothers now at their old home. It seems to me that he would talk to him differently from what this clergyman does; perhaps not more religiously, but so—so refreshingly, strengthening, helpfully; in his natural, healthy, simple way. I suppose it is through its being Sunday I have thought of him to-day. It has been a very long day, as Sundays sometimes are. But how natural it is for us all to be so grave and troubled, while, in our midst, one we have all grown fond of, is indeed, as he said, dying with the dying summer. Not that death has any terror for Evlyn. Do we not know how he has longed for it, and does he not himself remind us that it is ‘but a grey eve between two shining days?’ But when I look into his worn young face, and think how few shining days he has known lately, I may well feel heavy-hearted. And death is so lonely!

Tuesday, September 13th.

How strange that I should have written as I did on Sunday, for it was on that day that Mr. Gunn determined to come to Mary, and see if he could be of any help to her. And all through

more surprised than Mary, no one was more glad—I think.

He must be back in Rocklands for next Sunday, but I fancy he will stay to the limit of his opportunity. It is good to us all to see and hear him, and already—yes, indeed, already—death wears a different aspect in his presence. It cannot pain us, or make us afraid, when we look on Evlyn's face, although we know so well that

‘Soon in solemn loneliness,
The river must be passed.’

* * * * *

That was all I wrote last summer, and it is of that time that Mary has bidden me tell. I kissed her, as I said, without a word, but I felt it was a promise, and I took out the diary I had locked away a year ago, and have relived that summer time.

Oh, me, how vividly those troubled days came back to me, though I can see now, as I have wished, a glory shining on the darkest hour of all!

Surely only a few words need I add.

There is still a shadow of the old gravity on Mary's lovely face, but her husband understands; and it cannot give back the old cynicism, or prevent everyone reading in the beautiful eyes the deep, sweet happiness of her love for him, her trust in him, and her perfect, perfect confidence in his great love for her. Steadily, and even rapidly, Denis rises in his profession—while Mary's wealth is destined by them both for a noble purpose by-and-by—and I would like to feel that there are many such homes as theirs. In all his holidays, this home is Ernest Discombe's too, and scarcely less a guardian than an elder brother, is Denis to the lad whose own brother died so peacefully on the very day after that last entry in my diary. And what a home Mary makes for him! Sister, mother, friend—not one, but all—she seems to this boy whom she had never seen a year ago.

My mother and sisters are abroad now with Uncle Steven and Archie, and they write very happily and cheerily to me, for I am not with them! I am in a beautiful old brown parsonage among the cliffs not far from Westercombe. Somehow my heart seems too full to write—even here, and even now—of my own complete

ready always now to comfort me. The hand-clasp which I always thought so strengthening is mine when I will. And the kind, good face I never, from the first instant I saw it, forgot, looks its kindest and smiles its cheeriest upon me.

I could not believe it at first—why *should* he care for me?—but I knew it gradually, and I think he knows how grateful and how glad I was. And surely, if he knows it, that is enough.

Only one thing troubles me. I have still no power of inspiring awe into those sturdy little fellows whom I love almost as their father does, for they call us John and Barbara!—they even call me Barry sometimes, but that, I think, is their father's fault—and, though I know it is quite wrong, I am sadly afraid that I like it.

THE SORROW OF A SECRET.



THE SORROW OF A SECRET.

HER STORY.


July 20th.

THOUGH I ought to be laying the herbs out in the shade, that they may dry before their flowers burst, I cannot help being idle; and, with my arms full of them, I stand against the wall of the upper orchard, looking down upon our Golden Valley, and wondering whether the dear familiar scene could ever before have looked quite so beautiful as it looks this afternoon. Surely it was on such a day as this that King David heard the valleys laugh and sing, as they stood thick with corn, in a land as fair as ours! Surely on such a day as this even I—as he did—can hear the country's sweet low song of praise to Him who has

gathered nearly all the camomile flowers, when I hear father's whistle coming from the porch far behind me. This is the signal that he is ready for tea; so I climb the orchard wall, and wave my handkerchief to summon Tom. He answers me at last from his seat on the reaping-machine; then I spring to the ground again, and hasten to join father, leaving my herbs spread on the turf.

I pass two of the maids gathering peas for supper, and I wonder how they can be busy over any task on such an afternoon as this; then I watch a laden wagon come up from the meadow, and wind on to the yard. Indeed, when I join father at last, I know how I must have loitered by the way, because my hands are filled with roses. He is still standing in the porch, looking out over his harvest-fields, with that calm, happy look of his which I often think is brighter than a smile.

‘What a beautiful July this is, Thisbe!’ he says, looking so thoroughly a part of the sunny,



peaceful scene. 'I can scarcely recollect such a harvest.'

'Then what wonder is it, father, that I don't remember such a lovely summer before in all my life?'

'Of course not; your fullest harvests are all to come, dear,' father says, throwing his arm around me, as he always does when I am near him—unless he can throw it around mother, which, of course, he likes far better. 'Every summer, as it comes, will be the happiest summer of your life.'

With a laugh I put my hand upon his lips to silence him. Next summer seems so far away; and between now and then so much is possible!

Our silence is broken by mother's bright, quick voice from the open window.

'You should have brought Tom in with you, Thisbe. Tea is waiting.'

I try to slip from father's arm, that I may meet and hasten my brother, but father holds me tightly.

'Let Tom find his own way in. We may have to wait till to-morrow for tea, if you escape again; for I am quite sure I heard the tread of Briton's horse. Oh, it's of no use digging that scoop of a hat into me! It may be tied tight

at the sound of David's horse! Now do let me go and make the tea.'

'Too late,' says mother, joining us, and looking so pretty in her snowy muslin sleeves and cap and apron. 'I have made it; but it's all right, pet, for I have put in a spoonful extra for David.'

'Then for once we may feel grateful to David, father,' I say, merrily; 'for he is in Exeter, and we shall have that extra spoonful of tea to ourselves. There's Tom!'

I meet him at the gate, noticing how his sunburnt, handsome face has the same look of calm content that father's has.

'You are so like father, Tom,' I say, in my idle, irrelevant way, 'that I wish with all my heart I were more like mother. Then we should know how we would look in about twenty years.'

'Not a bit depending on the life between, eh, Thisbe?' he asks me, looking, as I do, at the two who are watching us from the porch. 'You just live as good and calm a life as mother's has

been, and by the end of five-and-twenty years you may be as pleasant to look upon. But if——’

‘Go on, Tom,’ I whisper, jogging his elbow when he stops so mysteriously. ‘What were you going to say?’

‘Never mind. It was nothing very wise or even probable,’ Tom says, just for an instant laying his hand upon my hair—Tom’s touch is always so kind and gentle, though his hands are brown and rather hard with work. ‘We are content with you as you are, and that is all you need worry about.’

And then, looking away from Tom’s face, with a smile for his lame conclusion, I see a look of something even sweeter than content on the dear faces that are watching us; and the love that is ever about me seems just at this moment to be the perfecting of this wonderful summer day.

Tea is nearly over—at least, I am just filling father’s cup for the third time—when Tom casually inquires who has looked at the *Times* to-day?

‘I only wanted to know,’ he goes on, when father has been made to confess that he fell asleep over it, ‘whether any of you had been

reminders that we are waiting and listening, he seems to come suddenly upon it, and reads it aloud :—

“DEVONSHIRE.—A gentleman, needing mental rest and country air, wishes to reside in a pleasant farm-house, where he might, for two months, live as one of the family. Would entail no extra trouble or expense. Preference given to Devonshire, and where trout-fishing is obtainable. Terms, offered for the months of August and September, twenty guineas.”

‘Very fair terms too,’ father says, ‘for an arrangement that sounds so simple ; and, if mother likes, I will answer it. No trout-fishing in all Devonshire is better than ours, and no air more health-restoring. The man has worn himself out, I suppose, with the London season ; or he is an artist perhaps, or opera-singer—who knows?’

‘At any rate,’ mother puts in, ‘he seems to want nothing we could not give him, and certainly our air would do him good. But

then the constant presence of a stranger——’

‘I see what mother means,’ Tom says, laying down the paper as mother pauses. ‘But two months is not a long time, mother, and the twenty guineas will buy Thisbe her wedding-gown.’

I am very angry with Tom for this suggestion, though his mischievous glance ruins my frown.

‘Father,’ I whisper, ‘won’t it buy mother that quiet pony of Mrs. Briton’s? She could drive that herself.’

‘And do you suppose,’ laughs father, ‘that she would be half as happy driving herself as she is being driven by me? Not she. But I’ll tell you what she would like,’ he goes on, his wide, kind glance taking us all in for a second, and then resting on mother’s listening face. ‘You and Tom, my pet, shall have a little holiday, and he shall show you London. You are eighteen now, and it is time you saw something as rare, if not as beautiful, as our hills and valleys. I would like Tom to have the change, and could trust you best with him. Tom shall take the twenty guineas and the little girl, and do his best—eh, my boy?’

‘But we haven’t got the guineas yet,’ mother

tisement in father's name, Tom?"—for Tom writes all father's letters now, just as mother likes me to write hers, that I may feel of use to her, because I like that so much.

Yes, Tom will write it at night, he says, when the harvest-work is over. Then he goes out once more, and father mounts Charlie and follows to the valley, while mother sits in the porch with me, wooed from every usual task by the exquisite beauty of this summer evening. So sweet and tranquil is this resting time, so full are our hearts of love and happiness, while we do not speak a word; that, when at last the falling back of the lawn-gate breaks the stillness, it seems a discord on the harmony of the hour—a ridiculous thought, as I say to myself in hasty reproach, while I rise to greet Edith Karne.

'I cannot stay, Mrs. Lee,' she says, when mother proposes leaving us two girls for a chat. 'I have only run over to say good-bye. I feel sure aunt will not let me go out to-morrow, and

the next morning I start for Boulogne. Mamma wants me with her now, for a wonder.'

'And I suppose you are delighted to go, Edith?' I say; for Edith tells us so very often how dull she is at the rectory with her uncle and aunt.

'No; I am not delighted to go,' Edith answers, with a shrug of her shoulders. 'It is scarcely less dull at Boulogne than at the rectory.'

'I should have fancied,' I begin, watching the shadow of the old house lengthen on the turf. But Edith interrupts me, laughing.

'Oh, your fancies, Thisbe, who can follow them? And of facts, what can you know?'

'Nothing,' I answer, as she pauses. I say it only as the simple truth, and with perfect content that it should be nothing.

'No,' she assents, in her clear, quick voice. 'You don't know what dulness means. What do *you* know of prim, closed rooms, where not one word is ever uttered either lovingly or merrily, where dinner is discussed as the one event of life, and where my deficiencies are rehearsed daily with sighs and groans?'

'It seems impossible, Edith,' I answer, won-

AND I AM SICK OF IT :

‘Then, as I said before, Edith, you must be glad to go.’

‘I shall only have to come back,’ she says, pushing aside a jessamine spray that comes creeping round the porch. ‘I shall have to come back to the long, stupid days with nothing in them—to uncle’s slow dinners and aunt’s plaintive sighs.’

‘Hush, Edith!’ mother puts in, gently. ‘Will you walk down the valley and say good-bye to Tom? Thisbe will be glad of the stroll with you.’

‘Your mother doesn’t like to hear me call everybody at the rectory stupid, Thisbe,’ Edith says, as we walk slowly to the harvest-fields, and I am looking out to the far horizon, where the golden upland touches the summer sky. ‘Yet it is awfully so. If it were not, I could not bear the thought of going to Boulogne, for mamma is as cold as ice to me, and my brother always has his own selfish amusements apart from anyone else. Oh, how shocked you try to

look, you baby Mentor ; but it's of no use ! It is not my own fault, as I daresay you insinuate, that there is no pleasure in my life here or there. You know nothing about it. You think you would find something to employ you and help others, even in such a life as mine at the rectory ; and, as the thought is born of ignorance, I will excuse you. There's Tom ! How courteously he comes to meet us as soon as he sees us ! I think, if my brother were like yours, Thisbe, I——'

I think Edith purposely leaves the sentence unfinished ; but it only seems as if she does so to greet Tom ; and it is not until she and I are parting, quite an hour afterwards, when I have walked with her to the rectory gate, that her voice takes again the same heavy, almost bitter tone.

'Thisbe, what shall you think if I come back engaged ?'

'Engaged ?'

'Yes ; engaged to be married. How you look at one, child ! Does it seem so impossible to you ? Do you think all young people are like you and your brother, and never think of any home but their father's ? I'm not going to spend all my years within these dull walls, you

I am doubtful——'

'Doubtful?' I do not mean to question her; I am only puzzled—knowing so little of the kind of love she speaks of—how a *doubt* is possible.

But Edith thinks I do question her, and turns to me with a laugh.

'He is a friend of my brother's, and the home he would give me would have no dismal uncles and aunts in it, nor hollow-hearted mother and brother. And yet, except those negative advantages, he has nothing very good to give me; so I am doubtful, as I said.'

'If I were doubtful, Edith,' I say, as she seems to wish me to say something, 'I should never accept any man's love. Could it be fair?'

'Fair enough,' laughs Edith. 'There are different kinds of love, you know.'

'Are there?'

'Of course there are, little Thisbe,' she says, with a sudden change of tone, and a caressing touch upon my shoulder. 'Let them go, as you

know so little, but there are. Surely David Briton has taught you something of this. 'Though,' she adds, laughingly, 'he hasn't yet taught you to blush at his name.'

'I think there can be but one sort of real love,' I answer, as we stand so quiet in the sunset light; but I say it shyly, because I know so little.

August 1st.

I never say it to mother, but it has risen to my lips a dozen times to-day—the wish that father had not decided to write about that advertisement. For to-day the gentleman is to come, and somehow, while I go about preparing for his coming, there is a feeling in my heart as if I were myself helping, not to interrupt the old life for a few weeks, as father so cheerfully says, that we may enjoy it the more when we go back to it, but to break it off for ever. I would not for the world tell mother this silly idea, for fear that she is really (like me) sorry Mr. Standish is coming; but, if she is, she hides it very easily and pleasantly, and seems to me looking quite anxiously for father's return with this stranger.

Tom laughs at me now and then, when he meets me, saying that he can plainly see my

dessert, when mother comes into the long parlour, and stands to see that the table is properly laid, 'how stiff and formal we shall feel at dinner!'

'Stiff and formal!' echoes mother, with a smile. 'Are all our natures—and our manners—so suddenly to change, my child? How prettily you have mixed the flowers and fruit; but Deborah need not have brought out the best glass. We are not going to make a stranger of Mr. Standish.'

'But suppose he makes strangers of us, mother?' I sigh, as I gather the loose leaves into the big pocket of my gardening apron. 'Suppose he will not let us feel him to be at home among us?'

'Thisbe!'

The utterance of my name is very quiet, yet so full of meaning that I turn instantly, with a sort of presentiment of the truth, which I see in a moment. Mother has turned away, and is greeting some one who could quite easily have overheard those fretful words of mine. It is too

late now to slip off my gardening apron, as I had intended to do before the dog-cart drove up; but, while I stand back, mother, without noticing me, chatting in her pleasant, genial way, leads the stranger from the room, and I hear their steps upon the stairs a minute or two afterwards.

Father only laughs when I ask him why he did not drive up to the front door with this strange gentleman, that we might have seen them coming, and been prepared.

‘Charlie prefers the side entrance,’ he says, pinching my cheek, ‘and Mr. Standish did not insist on any other. We need not have sent the cart for the luggage,’ he goes on, while I put away my apron, and we enter the parlour together, ‘for there is very little. I wonder what Mr. Standish means to do with himself for two whole months. Tell Deborah to ring the dinner-bell as soon as you like.’

I think father does this to show Mr. Standish that there is no ceremony at the farm, and that we only waited dinner for their arrival: and I think Mr. Standish understands, for he comes down grumbling at not being allowed time to wash his hands in comfort—yes, actually grumbling, in this first introduction, yet grumbling

just one of our usual merry chatty meals—except that there seems a freshness about it that makes me wonderfully astonished afterwards, when I find how long we have sat round the table.

Father rises and compares his watch with the time-piece, as if he thought the little clock had overtaken time, and we laugh at him, while Mr. Standish asks me whether our clock always scampers on at that rate. Not as a rule, I tell him, only on exceptional occasions. It is so easy to answer him or talk to him. Oh, how I wish it were as easy to prevent that burning in my cheeks, because it shows him so plainly that I am not used to talking in the way he makes me talk! Yet what way is it? I cannot tell. He seems to touch everything fearlessly, daintily, easily; and somehow he gives into my thoughts much that he does not say, or even make me say, only suggests. And in its newness this is very pleasant to me.

He praises our scenery only a little, but I see already, I think, that he uses few words when

he is pleased. Besides, of course he has seen but little of our country yet. One thing seems to have struck him—the beauty of that cottage on the hill where old Lord Rane lived many years. He says it is the very picture and realisation of a sweet and peaceful home, and indeed, if he thought so just looking up at it as he drove through the valley, how much more will he think it so when he sees the matchless view from its windows and its fairy gardens? I almost feel a little jealous for our dear old farm when I hear him praising this empty cottage, but I need not, for when he has been to his rooms to unpack, and comes into the parlour again, I see him stand at the open window, looking out with perfect content, and seeming to draw in thirsty breaths of our sweet air.

I look at him now more than I could during dinner: yet the same thing baffles me. Just as I feel I know his face exactly, some utterly new expression breaks upon it and changes it. I never saw this in any face before—never; and somehow it seems to make a strange wide difference between ourselves and him, yet a difference I cannot define. He stands quite upright at the window now, while Tom leans a little, opposite him; yet the real ease is in his

Now and then, when his face is quite at rest, I see a tired almost a worn look upon it which proves how truly he needs 'mental rest;' but no sooner do I catch a glimpse of it than it vanishes at his first words. I think he is handsome, yet he is like no one I have ever seen who has been called handsome, and certainly like no picture I have ever seen of a really handsome man. His mouth is stern, and his chin large—he has no moustache or beard to hide either—but his eyes are splendid, none the less so for that quick frown between his eyebrows which comes often and clears so magically in his ready laugh. No, I have never before seen a face at all like this, and I am afraid that has really made me 'stare,' as Tom tells me I have, when I go out to make the tea and he follows me.

'Did I really, Tom? Oh, why didn't you make a sign to stop me?'

'You were a hundred miles beyond the reach of signs,' he answers, linking his arm in mine, and taking me to the porch instead of to the

kitchen. 'If your eyes were not as round and big as saucers, I should not mind ; but, as it is, the family reputation has suffered. Poor Mr. Standish thinks you are not quite responsible for your actions. I saw him glancing at you with compassion when you seemed exceptionally irresponsible.'

'What do you think of him, Tom?'

Tom will not tell me ; no, though I beg him so earnestly that the bell rings for tea before I have remembered to make it. I never recollect Tom teasing me quite so persistently before. I try to show him a little offended dignity when I go back into the parlour, but he does not mind at all. He is talking to Mr. Standish ; and I notice how ruddy Mr. Standish makes him look, and how young too, though Tom is nearly twenty-five.

While we are at tea, Mr. Standish turns to me rather suddenly, and asks me if I will show him our gardens. I nod willingly—I am too much engrossed in my task to speak, because father likes his tea very sweet, and mother likes very little sugar, and Tom takes none, and Mr. Standish, I find, takes no milk, so that the pouring out requires my closest attention—but all the same I am a little surprised by the re-

come. So I—feeling how natural it is that he should prefer mother's company to mine—slip behind, and link my arm through father's, making him come too.

What an exquisite night it is! No wonder we are so unwilling to come in again. No wonder that even this stranger pauses so long in the dear old porch, with that dreamy gaze upon the moonlit valley.

H I S T O R Y.

August 3rd.

‘Change of air and consummate mental idleness.’

These were the blessings I was to seek in Devonshire; and though I have found the first indeed, and revel in it, I begin to fancy the second is impossible to me even here. Yet I do not know why I should say ‘even here.’ I might rather say is doubly impossible to me here, where, strange to say, every hour seems

to give birth to a new sensation. Yet born of what?

In this simple, punctual, unruffled household one would imagine consummate mental idleness would grow apace, flinging everywhere its little shoots and tendrils, called, as you choose, weariness, boredom, or despair. I look for them. I even feel for them, as if they were clinging about me, springing from the idle hours I have already spent. But I look and feel in vain. Not one of these exhaustive, sickly parasite shoots in this healthy atmosphere, and I must be content with change of thought as well as change of air, for consummate mental idleness I cannot win.

I may own now that I had keenly dreaded two months of irrepressible *ennui*, and had anticipated chafing, through every hour of the day, against my enforced isolation. But now, I must confess, that through the past forty-eight hours no one single feeling has been farther from my mind than that. Positively I have almost begun, on this second night, to regret the closing of another day. It is too absurd to bear recording. Still, of course, I must chronicle my advent here—which, by the way, might just as well have been done on

tal idleness which I had come on purpose to win. I suppose I was trying for it next morning too, when I rose in the early dawn, and threw my window wide to take 'a living glory-bath of light and air.' What a treat it was; and through such hours I have for years been sleeping!

I fancied, as Mr. Lee drove me here from Exeter, that I had chanced upon the most beautiful part of Devonshire; but when we reached what he called the Golden Valley—which in reality forms a gradual ascent to this picturesque old farm of Homer Hill—I felt indeed quite sure of it. A man has fair excuse for being proud, as well as fond, of such a home as this; and so I could understand that unconscious inflection of the farmer's voice when he pointed it out to me. But—much as I had been already prepossessed in his favour—I was scarcely prepared for the welcome that he gave me when we reached here; it was so gentlemanly, as well as genial—so perfectly without assumption, and yet so evidently uttered by the

man in authority. It was a simple, manly welcome, without one false note in it. We had not driven to the front entrance, as I found afterwards, and yet the bright and restful look of the house struck me in a moment, and I smiled to myself, recollecting one or two things which I had been schooling myself to be prepared for in my first experience of a farm. Mr. Lee may be the typical farmer, out among his men, exercising despotically his lordship of the soil—of course I cannot say—but here in his home he is gentle and indulgent, talking not overmuch, but always shrewdly and to the purpose; deferential, in an easy, unconscious way, to his wife; even brotherly with his son; and to his daughter—well, if she be wilful, or perverse, or even vain, she has almost a fair excuse in her father's doting, blind affection!

If—what a word it is, with its limitless perspective!

His son is like him—honourable, frank, and intelligent; pleasant to look upon too, and with an easy, unselfish disposition, which is a higher guide than any canon of good form; pleasant even to listen to, for the ordinary modern education has still the gloss upon it of a fresh, unsullied nature.

still ; but she is more than that. She looks the very poetry of what she really is—the wife and mother. I remember, she recalled to me at once Clough's lines—

‘ Pretty is all very pretty—it is prettier far to be useful ;
Any way, beautiful only to be the thing one is meant for.’

Beautiful she is indeed in her household, being so exactly and so perfectly what she was ‘ meant for.’ Sometimes I think her daughter is very like her ; next minute I see a wide dissimilarity, and I can scarcely fancy the daughter living the mother's life. Yet what so natural, or even—in the sense of the word as I have just used it—so beautiful ? In the sweet freshness of the morning, I suppose we seldom can even imagine the evening calm.

I feel as if I had tried once or twice before to describe this girl—or has it been only in my thoughts, as I have stood at my window here, seeing her among the trees and flowers ? But even in my thoughts no words seem quite to fit her. Piquant as her prettiness is, I hate to use

that word which might describe an ingenious ball-room belle, and I cannot apply to this girlish face, with its wonderful look of purity, any of those terms of praise which have grown so horribly familiar to me in——

Thisbe! The quaint and pretty name crowns fitly the dainty, graceful girl whom Moore might indeed have pronounced ‘rich in all woman’s loveliness.’ What could even he—the universal lover of women—have said more than that, even if he had sat here, as I am doing, and tried to describe the young changing face, with the delicate brows, pure soft skin, fresh sweet smile, lovely, happy eyes, and those merry gentle lips that could indeed ‘persuade without a word’? What could even he—master as he was in the art of flattery—have said, except that Nature has been very good to this farmer’s daughter?

Yet she is not beautiful, in the strict acceptance of the term. I have known too well and too long the laws of female beauty to be mistaken even here. The bright young face would not stand the test, and yet, I think, never before in all my thirty years has any face,—or the nature looking through the face—had this haunting effect upon me. Haunting me, too, come back a few words which the very first sight of it

5

It has always been one of our summer pleasures to carry tea to the waterfall, and drink it there in picnic fashion; but I never remember to have enjoyed any gipsy-tea so perfectly as this one to-day.

Just at first this morning, when mother proposed it so unexpectedly, thinking only of the beauty of the day, I was afraid; remembering how different Mr. Standish is from us; from Tom and me, or David, or Carrie Briton, who have been accustomed to this sort of thing. But that fear soon died, and I think of all our little party it is the London gentleman who most revels in the delicious August sunshine here to-day, and most relishes our merry and impromptu meal. This makes me wonder, for the hundredth time, if anything here has ever really been quite *new* to him. I have felt beforehand that it must be so, and father has said, 'That will be a new experience for Mr. Standish,' yet nothing ever seems new to him when it comes. He joins so easily in every-

thing, and his part in it seems so natural a one—though it is always the most prominent—that it is often hard to realise that we ever had quite these same pleasures without him, or that they can ever be the same when his place is empty once again—just as hard as to fancy him in any way constrained or not perfectly at home and at his ease. What is this power he has of, as it were, fitting everything? But I may wonder through many a day and night, and nothing can answer me in these short two months. As father said, when I found out that he too shared this wonder of mine, ‘He has lived a wide life somewhere, little Thisbe. Don’t you try to reach it.’

What a beautiful afternoon we are having! Mrs. Briton and mother look like a double portrait of content, as they sip their tea, ensconced in a sort of throne of rock among the turf above the little waterfall. Father could not come to-day; but Tom lies lazily upon his back, on the smoothest spot of all, his hands under his head, and his merry eyes turned from their quizzing. He says his work is over now and his rest is earned. I suppose Carrie thinks so too, for she goes presently and sits beside him, bearing a fourth cup of tea for him and a third for herself. I *seem* to be presiding over the tea, and to be

and laugh, I am fancying myself of use ; and David is—just as David always is—kinder to me than any words can say. Once this evening we came rather suddenly upon him at the well, where Mr. Standish came to fill a kettle for me, and I never saw him looking so sad in all my life, though he smiled and spoke a moment afterwards. When he was gone, Mr. Standish looked down into my face gravely—so gravely that no wonder I laughed when the funny little question followed—

‘ Is his name Pyramus ? ’

But tea has long been over now ; and our fire under the scaur is dying. We have had a merry talk together, then have watched the sunset, talking very little. Now Deborah has been, with one of the men, to fetch the baskets in, and we are going.

The spot is so near home, and we are so likely to come again soon—and again, and again, if we choose—that it is very silly of me to linger still, as if I could not bear to leave it. Happy as

this evening has been, there are surely as happy ones still to come.

‘Some day,’ Mr. Standish says, when he and I pause to look down the Golden Valley, ‘I want you to take me to that pretty house on the hill—the rookery, your father called it. Is it vacant now?’

‘Yes; old Lord Rane lived there many years. Now his heir wishes to sell it. It is very beautiful there, Mr. Standish; and the cottage itself is quite a gentleman’s house, however small.’

‘I saw that at once,’ he answers, speaking more slowly and thoughtfully than he usually does. ‘What a calm untroubled life one might fancy a man living there! Ah, who is here?’

I can scarcely believe it at first, because I have so little expected Edith Karne’s return just yet; but I run forward to give her my welcome back.

‘Well, Thisbe,’ she inquires, when I have taken her up to my room, to leave her hat and brush her hair, and she holds me by both hands and seats herself upon my bed, ‘and so that is Mr. Standish, is it? What a remarkable-looking man!’

‘How?’ I ask, laughing down at her, as she holds me standing at her side.

of him.

‘Handsome? N-o-o, not exactly; but he has wonderful eyes, and something in his face that—that makes one stare at it. Why are you colouring so?’

I shake my head smiling, for I will not tell Edith how rudely I stared at Mr. Standish on his first arrival. He has grown so like an old friend now, that I had forgotten that unfortunate misdemeanour of mine until Edith’s words recalled it.

‘How soon you criticise anyone’s face, Edith! You spoke scarcely half a dozen words to him before we came up. Come, it is not polite of me to leave Carrie Briton.’

‘Pooh! Carrie never frets for you; and, as for criticising Mr. Standish’s face, why, it is so intensely peculiar, I’ll defy a nun to help talking of it! I have been so taken by surprise too. I thought it was an invalid who was coming to you, Thisbe. What is he?’

‘A gentleman. Come.’

‘Don’t try to look proud, Thisbe ; it does not suit you. I will soon find out what you cannot—I mean, won’t—tell me. Is he engaged?’

‘Edith, how can I possibly know?’

‘By his letters, of course. Has he many?’

‘Yes.’

‘In female writing?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Don’t you know whether there are many letters in one lady’s hand?’

I laugh out unrestrainedly now; I really cannot help it.

‘I never noticed, Edith. I forgot you would want to know.’

‘You are no true daughter of our mother Eve,’ remarks Edith, rising and going to the glass. ‘I’m disappointed in you, Thisbe. How long does this London gentleman stay here?’

‘He came for two months, August and September.’

‘And August is nearly over already. I must take down my hair. Chat to me while I do it. What a dear little room this is of yours!’

‘I wish you were staying here, Edith,’ I answer, grieved to hear that mournful note in her voice. ‘You will come over as often as you can, won’t you?’

‘Yes; I always do get out of the Ecclesiastical Court as quickly as I can.’

‘Hush, Edith! You forget yourself when you speak so of the rectory.’

‘No; the fault is the other way, child. I *remember* myself when I speak so of the rectory. How delighted David looked to-night when you gave him that spray of heather!’

‘I gave one to everybody,’ I say, wondering why Edith seems to have dragged in that remark. ‘I gathered it on purpose on my way home.’

‘But only David had the blush.’

It is of no use contradicting Edith; and to my great surprise—for it is not like her—she never ceases joking me of David, until she has put her hair up prettily, and is ready to go down.

Then I ask her very quietly the question which I fancy she has come to-night on purpose to answer.

‘Edith, did you accept that gentleman in Boulogne?’

She shakes my hand from her arm, and there comes a strange, angry look upon her face which changes it entirely.

‘What childish nonsense!’ she says, laughing

as I have never heard her laugh before. 'Is a woman to accept every offer she receives? You don't understand these things. If you ever have to break a man's heart, you won't like to be questioned about it afterwards.'

And I should not. So I say no other word to Edith, only link my arm in hers as we go downstairs together, just to show her that I understand ever so little of what such a regret would be. I leave Edith at the door of the front parlour, where they are all sitting, and I go on to the kitchen just to see if there is anything for which I am wanted about supper. But mother, in her great thoughtfulness, has arranged all this to spare me, and so I know we can have some music before Deborah is ready to ring the bell.

They are preparing for music when I go back into the parlour, Edith and Mr. Standish being together at the piano.

'We are waiting for you,' he says, in his clear, distinct way.

'We want you to play,' Edith adds, turning her back to the piano, and looking steadily at me.

But, as she knows, I cannot play fit to be heard; so Mr. Standish chooses me a song in-

Mr. Standish plays it so well, and makes so much more of it than I can ever do. It is he who presently persuades Edith to play, and then walks away from the piano himself, and stands at the open window. I feel as if I knew quite well how he must be enjoying her music, for she is quite a wonderful player, and of course in the country among us such music is very rare. She plays piece after piece, knowing what a treat she is giving us, and everyone sits mute to listen. The first break in the quietness is made by Mrs. Briton beckoning me to her side with a whispered question. Then I am close to Mr. Standish, and he arrests me coolly.

‘Is the mother of Pyramus grieving over his abstracted air?’

‘Who is she?’

‘Badly feigned, Miss Thisbe. Wasted on you is that delicate suggestion of the mulberry-coloured ribbon in her cap.’

‘Does not Miss Karne play well?’ I ask; for somehow, while he speaks, he has drawn back a

little, and we stand half in and half out of the low, open window.

‘Magnificently,’ he answers, with great readiness. ‘I feel rapt and enchained, as Christopher Sly did over the comedy. “’Tis an excellent piece of work—would ’twere done!’”

Then, in my great stupidity, I question him on what has often amused us.

‘Mr. Standish, you can always quote something that fits in. How much you must have learned!’

‘Nothing,’ he laughs, but the laugh is very quiet. ‘Things commit themselves to my memory, but I am not even conscious of their having done so until they become a part of my—immortality. What are you wondering over, my child?’

I am wondering over his last few words, but I cannot tell him so. I only make a useless remark to fill in the gap.

‘You must very much miss your books now, Mr. Standish,—for it has surprised us all that he brought none with him.

‘Do I look such a formidable reader? Is that what your eyes are saying? No, I don’t miss my books. I miss nothing. I left everything behind me because, like King Harold, I was “sick for an idle week.”’

‘What an incorrigible duffer I am!’ he says, shaking his hair from his forehead, where the frown has gathered, though his voice is full of fun. ‘Anyone would fancy I had been all my life studying how to fit other men’s words to my own ideas, or—the reverse. I thought last Sunday how absurd it was to hear Mr. Karne quoting Shakespeare from the pulpit. How it jangled out of tune!’

I tell him demurely that I do not think even he could have found a more apt quotation than Mr. Karne’s.

‘No,’ he laughs, ‘nor have been more able

“To pluck the eyes of sentiment, and dock the tail of rhyme,
To crack the voice of melody, and break the legs of time.”

What a blessing that supper-bell is, for you will have no time to say what you think about my quotations, unless—— Will you?’

But I know, of course, that I am the last in all the room to take the arm he offers me; so David and I go in together, as we have so often and often done before; and it seems to me just one of our usually long merry suppers. But

David makes me a little uncomfortable once or twice by whispering to me that Mr. Standish must be accustomed to brilliant society, and that his coming here is 'very strange.'

I think it is. It often seems so to me; yet somehow it makes my head ache a little when David says it.

It is a beautiful moonlit night, and we all go out into the garden with our visitors when they are leaving us. I so often walk with Tom to the rectory, when he takes Edith home, that I quite naturally prepare to do so to-night; but something Edith says to Mr. Standish stops me.

'I shall walk alone. I know the way too well to be afraid, and I would not for the world deprive Miss Briton of Tom's society.'

I do not wait to hear Mr. Standish's answer; but a few minutes afterwards he and Edith go off together, while Tom and I saunter up the lane with Carrie Briton, and then wait till the phaeton reaches us and she gets in. Of course, as we stroll so slowly home again, I do not tell Tom what Edith had said about depriving Carrie of his company. She must have forgotten that Carrie would drive with her mother. And Edith will amuse Mr. Standish—she has seen so much, and knows his sort of world.

yard a minute.'

I try to pass Mr. Standish unobserved, though I am sure I cannot tell why. But he either sees or hears me at once, throwing his cigar over the far hedge, just where it will fall among the celery.

'You have been a long time,' he says, in a grave sort of calculating way. 'Did you find it so hard to lure your brother from the sister of Pyramus?'

'Please don't talk so of Miss Briton. She is the nicest girl you could possibly know.'

'Then what about Miss Karne?'

'Oh, she is—pretty, isn't she?'

'I daresay. Describe her to me, that I may know.'

'You saw her.'

'No; I saw but one girl all this evening.'

'How well you talk with invisible beings, then, Mr. Standish!' I say, stooping to improve the tying of one of my carnation props. 'Was the rector invisible too?'

'He was visible in the garden, placidly digest-

ing his dinner. I saw his white neck-cloth with its "straitened tie; The sober hat, the Sabbath-speaking eye."

'Edith is not very happy at the rectory.'

'Is she happy anywhere?'

'She likes going about,' I say, deprecating this idea of his. 'She knows London quite well.'

'And you do not, do you?' he asks me, laughing at my tone; and then, just as politely as if he had not heard me before, he makes me tell him what I hope to see. I know what a jumble it must seem to him, because at last he gives me his own version of what he has gleaned from me.

'You want to hear Patti—and you will be far too late; to see the picture-galleries—and they will all be closed; to hear the Guards' band—and you will never get up in the morning in time; to stroll in the Parks—and they will be empty as a desert; to see the Tower—and the crowd will not let you see it; to hear *Romeo and Juliet*, with Muller as Romeo—and he will by that time have left town. Poor child! I would stay in this sweet Devonshire valley.'

'You see, Mr. Standish,' I urge, timidly, 'you cannot judge for me, because you are tired of

Then he is suddenly and strangely silent ; and I wonder so sadly whether I can have touched a time it pains him to recall, or whether he is simply tired of me.

H I S T O R Y .

August 26th.

‘What is it?’

I seem for ever asking myself vaguely that question, so perhaps, if I write it now, it will haunt me less. Is it really so? Have I given all my heart to this simple country girl, whose eyes have looked on nothing low or base, whose lips are pure as the sky above her own green hills, whose heart knows nothing of what passion means? I, for whom life has been so wide and deep, and in whose world her world would show but as a speck upon a globe! I!

But I myself am changed. How little I thought, when I came here to seek utter idleness from thought, that for my thoughts there never could be utter idleness again! How little I dreamed, when they told me that I should be bored

to death here, with no ambition to gratify, that I should work harder than I have ever worked before, in my ambition to be homely and simple; and that my highest aim would be to win a primitive little home among the Devonshire hills, and a wife! No, it would not do!

Yet what a charm she has, herself so utterly unconscious of it! If her face is to haunt me in this way, day and night, the sooner I leave it the better—if I can. Yet would it not haunt me in whatever life I live? Is it not too late now ever to shut it from my heart? Pooh! I'll go up to town, and break this ridiculous infatuation. What a laugh they would have against me if they knew! I, who have been thought so exacting, and so hard to satisfy, so keen and strict a critic, am enthralled by every trifling act and every word of a girl in her teens! I, who have laughed at woman's love as a fable, have staked my whole life's happiness on just one word from a slip of a girl! Absurd indeed! I will go up to town to-morrow.

How clearly and prettily she talks, and how hungry she is to read! I am glad I brought no books, I should be jealous of them while she read; and I read none, for she is the sweetest book to me. Sometimes she talks of that Lon-

never get that woman's name so soon. But how could it hurt her? She would be there what she is here. I shall write presently to Lord Rane about the Rookery. What a home it might be! And now I can fancy my heart's desire—— All this is nonsense of course. I must be in town early in November, so, even if I wished it, I could not extend my stay here very late. But I will run up to-morrow for a change. I think I need a change now more than I did when I came. I was not haunted then by one face and form and voice.

HER STORY.

August 31st.

Mr. Standish has been away for a few days, and we have missed him much—so much that it seems strange to me, when I remember that we are all at home, the little group among whom I used to dread a stranger coming. Edith Karne comes nearly every day to spend a few hours with us, for she says the farm is more like home to her than the rectory.

Tom tells her, in the coolest manner, that it

is her fault the rectory is dull to her. He is telling her so (but I am too busy to listen, trying to finish a task of mother's before she comes in) when Mr. Standish enters, just as coolly as if he had never left the house. Yet I fancy, when he first comes in, that he looks anxiously at me, in a steady way, almost as a stranger might look.

‘I felt quite sure you would return for to-morrow's shooting, Mr. Standish,’ Tom says. ‘You did not say you would, so I suppose you were afraid the business that took you to London might keep you?’

‘Is it finished now?’ I question, rather shyly.

‘No; it is not.’

‘No?’

I think it is Edith who echoes the word in such astonishment.

‘No! what I went to do I find impossible. So my journey and my time have been wasted utterly.’

‘You enjoyed yourself though, I feel sure, Mr. Standish,’ Edith says, seeming to settle herself for a long conversation, while I slip away to order dinner for Mr. Standish, with our tea.

When I come back, she seems to be much

living in the country, Mr. Standish,' Edith is saying, a smile on her lips, and her hands lying idle.

'No.'

'Yet you would not look so well and so strong, I think, if you spent your days in a London office.'

'I daresay not, Miss Karne,' he answers, easily.

But my cheeks grow very warm, for she has no right to question him here; and he looks at me all the time, so that I feel I ought to stop her questioning.

'I thought one day,' Edith goes on, 'when I heard you advising Mr. Lee what to say to his lawyers, that you were very clever in law. Have you studied it?'

'A little.'

'Not enough to practise?' she asks, in a tone of disappointment, as if she had come to a stumbling-block.

'Not enough to practise for anybody's benefit.'

'Do you know what I have heard one or two

people say,' she goes on, after a moment's pause, and with another smile; 'that it is plain, by your walk and your bearing, that you have been in the Army? Have you been a soldier, Mr. Standish?'

'Yes.'

'But are not now?'

'No.'

Edith's colour deepens a little; she is getting provoked as well as puzzled. As for me, I would like to go away, but I want to finish all the preserve labels before mother comes in.

'Do you remember,' Edith persists, almost without a pause, 'taking me home one night, and listening to all my aunt's complaints about her medicine? Well, do you know she told me, after you were gone, that she felt sure you must be a physician.'

'I have been.'

If I were not so vexed by Edith's useless curiosity, I am sure I should laugh, though I still write on; yet through it all I hear no sound of laughter in Mr. Standish's voice.

'Is it possible?' Edith cries, and looks rather blankly at him.

'But is that all, Miss Karne? Has not your uncle, the worthy rector, told you, after one

really been a clergyman?"

'Yes; and really worn the "straightened tie and sober hat."'

'You seem,' Edith ponders, 'to have tried everything.'

'Not quite,' he answers, rising and coming to quiz my labels. 'I have not tried thimble-rigging yet. Now, Miss Thisbe, I will finish those. Did *you* expect me home so soon?'

It seems strange just for that first moment to hear him speak of the farm as home; but I am very glad, as he has still a month to stay with us.

'I think,' remarks Edith, from her seat at the window, while she watches him, 'that you are thinner for your London week, Mr. Standish.'

'No wonder,' he answers, briefly.

Tom comes in again then, and I hear Mr. Standish ask him how he is to address to Lord Rane, because he is going to write at once and ask for the Rookery. How strange it will seem to have him for a neighbour, within five miles of us! I can scarcely fancy it. But of course

—as Edith says, when she goes upstairs with me to put her hat on—he will come down to Devonshire only once a year, just for a little shooting, and then he will have the Rookery full, and not come over here. Naturally it would be so.

‘Even yet, Thisbe, you see,’ Edith says, looking around, to be quite sure we are alone, ‘I have not found out his profession.’

‘Why did you try?’

‘Because I want to know. I’ve found one thing though, and that is that he has a bullet-wound somewhere, and it makes him wince. I don’t like such reserve, Thisbe. It looks bad.’

‘I don’t see any manner of reserve about Mr. Standish,’ I maintain, pausing with my hand on the door.

‘I don’t say,’ Edith acknowledges, ‘that it affects his manner—he is debonair enough—but then you must remember he is having his own way here entirely. He reminds me of the wind that came up out of the sea, “and said, Oh! mists, make room for me!” I can fancy him in a tearing rage if the mists did not make room.’

September 4th.

Father has friends shooting with him, so we are not to dine till eight. David is among them,

here already, though it is not yet four o'clock; but she assures me, as she sits watching me bleaching almonds, that she is paying me only a call now, and is going home again to come ceremoniously with her uncle and aunt. She offers to help in my countless little preparations; but when her help is offered, and she questions me, and waits for my orders, there seems nothing for her to do.

‘Is Mr. Standish shooting with the others?’ Edith asks, sitting on the kitchen-table, and swinging her feet.

‘Not to-day. He had an idle fit, and said his fishing was so nearly over that he would fish to-day.’

‘Where?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Don’t know?’ laughed Edith. ‘How convenient—until you want him!’

‘Thisbe,’ calls Tom, coming in just then—for, though he could not be spared to shoot this morning, he is evidently at liberty now—‘are

you busy? Because, if not—and you are willing, Edith—let us take tea by the river. Mr. Standish is at the bend, and it is such a lovely afternoon! Come, there are four good hours before dinner.'

'Capital!' cries mother from the farther table, where she is filling the custard glasses. 'I was just wanting an hour's fresh air for Thisbe. Now, Edith, if you will help in earnest for ten minutes, she will be free. Deborah will put up the tea. Ask Sarah for a new cake, Deborah, and go to the dairy for a jar of cream. That's right, Edith; I like to see you running about.'

Mother's cheery words hurry us all; and she seems so delighted for us to have this pleasure, that it is doubly a pleasure; and in less than half an hour all my little tasks are finished, the basket packed, and on Tom's shoulder, and we have started merrily, with many a backward glance and smile for mother, as she waits in the porch.

Mr. Standish springs up in astonishment when he catches sight of us; and we can all see how delighted, as well as astonished, he is by this break in his day's sport.

'It proves,' says Tom, with a laugh, 'that he was not born an Izaak Walton.' But Edith says that it proves far more clearly that he has

singing merrily, and I am just standing idly resting, looking down the river, 'Thisbe looks as if she considered fishing a cruel sport, doesn't she?'

'She does indeed. I know exactly how she feels.

"When I behold a butcher with horn-handled knife
Slaying a tender lamb as dead as mutton—
Indeed, indeed, I'm very, very sick!"

It is of no use—I am obliged to turn round in speechless wonder, while Tom and Edith stand staring too. Yet it is impossible to tell why the few ridiculous words should have struck us so.

'I have read or heard those lines a hundred times,' Tom says, pondering. 'Yet they sounded new to me. I have never heard anyone read or quote as you do, Mr. Standish.'

'I can do this better,' he answers, building up the fire.

'You can do everything, I think,' Edith says.

'No; there is one thing I cannot manage.'

'Really? What can it be?'

‘I cannot smell a rose but prick my nose against the thorn!’

‘But, Mr. Standish,’ I put in, for I know this time what he quotes, ‘you can always take the consolation, you can always “rail against the rose”!’

‘No,’ he answers, with a laugh, but a great brightness in his eyes, ‘that is still more impossible with me.’

Our funny little picnic is over, when Edith, after a few minutes’ unusual silence, makes a suggestion that rather astounds us all, especially as she makes it to Tom, only glancing at Mr. Standish.

‘I have been wondering whether we could act a charade to-night. We shall be plenty both for audience and actors. It could not help being a success with Mr. Standish in it.’

‘Impossible!’ he says, answering for Tom with a brief, quick laugh, and still with an unusual light in his wonderful eyes.

‘Oh, don’t say impossible!’ she cries, warming to her cause. ‘It would be such a treat for us quiet country people. Could you refuse us? You could choose your staff. Tom would be sure to do it well, so would David Briton.’

‘Pyramus would be sure to do it well, would

never seen acting of any sort, except our nonsense as children. She has never seen a play at all. Won't you help to initiate her, if only in compassion ?

'No. Indeed no!' he answers, with so much determination in his tone that I wonder over it; knowing now that it would be of no use to entreat him any more.

'They would of course be only improvised, and no one would expect perfection from us,' insists Edith, never attempting to relinquish her idea, though now we have reached the gate where she has to turn aside for the rectory.

But still there is no sign of Mr. Standish relenting.

'Oh, Mr. Standish,' Edith says, turning back after she has passed the gate, 'I quite forgot to tell you! Uncle has a friend with him to-day who knows you. He is coming with us to Homer Hill this evening.'

It is a mistake of mine, of course. It cannot be that the strong handsome face has grown white and stiff all in a minute. It is impossible,

and yet I never imagined this before; and—and Tom is looking as curiously as I am at Mr. Standish. The silence has lasted but a few seconds, and now he is saying something to Edith, so lightly, even excitedly, that she fancies he has changed his mind, as well as manner, and once more pleads for a charade under his management. But when he refuses now his refusal is altogether different. His face is white and hurt, but full of resolution now, stern and immovable; and even Edith sees this new look, and drops her entreaty.

Mr. Standish is very silent all the way home, and Tom and I are silent too, I do not know why, unless it is because he influences us so much, even unconsciously. Indeed, for the first time since he has been with us, I am glad for us to separate in the porch, and go to our rooms.

Of course mother and I are down before anyone arrives, except Carrie Briton. But very soon father comes in with his friends; then come Tom and David, and—last and rather late—Mr. and Mrs. Karne and Edith, with a quiet, middle-aged gentleman. We are all here except Mr. Standish.

Mother, in despair, is just asking Tom in a

seems proud and quiet, as he has never looked before—stern and distant even. He goes up to those he knows among our guests, and father brings the strangers to him, to introduce in our old-fashioned way; but his back seems turned upon the rectory party, and so he does not see how curiously the rector's friend is scanning him from behind his glasses. I can see that Edith is waiting to attract his attention, yet hesitating, because she, like myself, is struck by the strangeness in both his manner and his face. But, when she finds we have waited only for Mr. Standish, and are going in to dinner now, she makes a step forward and touches him.

‘Mr. Standish, I suppose my uncle's friend scarcely needs an introduction to you, but, if you forget, allow me—Mr. Singer.’

Mr. Standish bows in a stiff, ceremonious way, which seems to sit unnaturally upon him. Then the old gentleman speaks out, pushing his glasses high on his forehead.

‘Pardon me, I find I have mistaken. This is not the Mr. Standish I know. I have never had the pleasure of meeting this gentleman before.’

‘To me it makes the pleasure greater now,’ Mr. Standish says, in just his usual pleasant way, and his face has its old look of ease.

I am just making up my mind not again to wonder over any words and looks of his, when he comes up to my side, and puts my hand on his arm.

‘I have permission,’ he says, in that resistless way of his. ‘Did you guess I was going to leave you to Pyramus? Thisbe, we will have the charade, if you wish it.’

‘But you said——’

‘Never mind what I said then. Forget the *then*, and remember only the *now*. I must whisper Miss Karne to think of a good word.’

‘She will be so surprised,’ I say, recalling how unhesitatingly he had refused her request by the river.

We discuss the charade merrily, and I wonder to myself whether the acting can be half so pleasant as this merry planning of it, broken into—as it so constantly is—because we do not talk in couples all through dinner, as Edith says we ought at a dinner-party. Indeed, everybody seems to talk so much to everybody else that Mr. Standish often laughs at the difficulty he has to speak privately to me, or to Edith, who

always a favourite lounging-place with Mr. Standish when it is bright and light and empty, as it is to-night. It is Mr. Standish who hits upon the word. It is Mr. Standish who sketches to us the little story we are to act, and fits a part to each of us. It is Mr. Standish who gives some mysterious touch to the improvised costumes, to make them comic or picturesque; and in the easiest and most natural way hints to us how we can make our acts and our speeches, touching or laughable. But he denies it flatly when Tom tells him that the praise they give us is due to him alone.

‘You were all magnificent,’ he says, in his bright way. ‘I never in my life enjoyed acting as I have done to-night.’

And I, chancing to meet his eyes just then, can see that he really means it, though it seems strange indeed to me. I have not been quite so stupid in my parts as I felt sure I should be. It was far more easy to me, and somehow the merry answers seemed to come of their own

accord just when I wanted them. And as for acting with Mr. Standish, why, there was simply no trouble at all, because he seemed so exactly the person he represented, that I was literally deceived into feeling with him the person *I* represented. What a new thing it is to me, and how delightful!

I say this to Mr. Standish, when it is all over and we are separating in the hall, but I only say it because he asks me almost earnestly whether it is not far wiser to be ourselves always, and to act no part at all.

Even when our last guest has left, I do not feel at all sleepy, but I come to my room, and sit at the open window, thinking over this evening. Yet why? It is but in a confused and unconnected way that it comes back to me. I remember our swift, excited racing up and down stairs, our inroads upon mother's wardrobe, and the utter wreck we made of mine. I remember how difficult it was to repress our talk and laughter at the last minute before appearing; and how doubly difficult—for me at least—to keep serious when the laughter of our audience grew so evidently beyond their control. I remember once or twice seeing

to me, even in a whisper. I wish it so very especially to-night, because of what David told me, when Carrie kept him so long, and he and I chanced to be at the gate together. Oh, David, dear old friend, it was so sad to see your face with that new, sorry look upon it! But the old cheeriness will come back soon, I think, because we are almost as like one family as if you and I—— How impossible that would be!

So all my memories of this evening are, as I say, jumbled together; and, except my own enjoyment, only one thing is clear to me—how wonderfully well Mr. Standish acted, how easy every part seemed to him, and how undefinably and yet immeasurably he eclipsed every one of us!

But—yes, one thing more I do remember—clearest of all. How strangely and unexpectedly Mr. Standish changed in one of his scenes, and—it seemed with only a few words and one slight gesture—touched us into utter silence, and made a strange lump come into my throat!

It is of no use wondering how he could move us so, without the slightest effort. I could never understand ; I only know it was so.

HIS STORY.

September 4th.

To-night I have won Mr. Lee's permission to woo his daughter for my wife. Coming as I did, an utter stranger to his house, I felt this due to him before I allowed a word of love to pass my lips to her. Now I need not guard my lips and eyes as I have done. Now I may strive to make this little maiden comprehend how she has become my heart's desire—my heart's longing and desire. I think I have felt her so from the first minute that I looked upon her sweet, pure face—even before I learnt that, while her thoughts were so fresh and childlike, there was a depth and courage in the tender, untried heart. Now I may tell her of the new hopes which I have found it so hard to conceal, of the one strong, resistless feeling which makes all others dim to me as in a dream.

My love—my fairy love, who has changed the world for me—I need no longer now hold back the words that sometimes rush so passionately to my lips when you are with me!

not half, not any, more than that. How could I help feeling keenly for him, even in my own great hope? They all love her so dearly—and what wonder?—that it will be a wrench indeed even if I only take her to that pretty house I have so constantly dreamed of lately, and that is promised to me at last. What a home it will be! Our home—my wife's and mine! What delicious words to write! Whatever countries we may visit, or wherever we may care to stay for a time, there will be the peaceful, beautiful little home to come back to, and always rest and happiness for me in her presence. What will she say to me? It almost seems as if she would start and fly at any words of love, yet she must have heard them, if only from—— I will not write his name, poor fellow!

What a treat it was to see her to-night! I never doubted her bright natural genius; but anything so indescribably *glad* as her acting, I never saw. Of course I never saw it, for how could I have seen such fresh, spontaneous acting? How immensely superior was her conception of each part to her friend Miss Karne's,

and yet in a conventional way Miss Karne was more correct! And the young men—how ready and intelligent they were! Altogether, what I had dreaded as likely to prove a weariness and depression, made me laugh, in a ridiculously boyish fashion, as I have not laughed for years. But then this summer I have been so unlike myself that nothing more can surprise me.

If that friend of the rector's had really known—but why turn back to look into the face of any dead alarm?

I wish I were not obliged to be away so early in November. Yet how ridiculous to dread a short absence, when only two bare weeks ago I rushed away and tried to live without her! Tried, and failed utterly! After that one voluntary exile, when my heart yearned for her through every hour of my absence, and every thought and hope of mine were so closely woven round her that I could not live my life away, can I ever doubt what is my heart's one strong desire? Come to me, little Thisbe; and, for the precious, priceless gift, a better life than I have ever lived shall prove my long, undying gratitude.

September 5th.


I knew my darling would pass down the

myself, in my great anxiety, that she seemed late in coming; but I had spent nearly two hours strolling to and fro, before I heard her singing as she came into my sight; as fair and bright a picture as ever artist's eyes could rest upon; no shadow in the lovely eyes, the fresh lips laughing, it might seem, at any possibility for her of wakeful nights, such as she herself has made me spend.

She had a bunch of hawthorn-berries in her dress, and they seemed like a glimpse of the winter she would make so gloriously beautiful for me; while in her little basket lay a bunch of the roses whose scent will ever seem to me the very breath of this past happy summer.

I remember that she looked wonderingly up into my face at the first word I spoke to her, as if she read something in my voice, even before my lips had uttered their longing; and then——

Had I ever guessed that I should tell that story of a man's love which I have often—that I should tell it, without having thought beforehand what I should say, or knowing afterwards



what I had said? But how could I know, when every word came straight from my heart, and it was on *her* words, not mine, that happiness depended? It was for her answer that I listened, as for life or death, in that sweet summer silence.

And when it came! My love, my little love, could you ever guess that I, who seemed so strong to you perhaps, felt like a child in that flood of new delicious happiness, when my heart had won its desire?

Can I really believe, even yet, that this great blessing has come to me, though every look of her dear happy eyes tells me I am not dreaming still, as I have dreamed so long, and that she too is well content—though timidly and shyly so just yet—to rest within my care and love? She is going with me to-morrow, for the first time, to that pretty house upon the hill which is to be our home when she will come. I waited only for the promise she gave me to-day, and then I wrote at once to secure it, knowing she would love to live near her old home, and that for them the parting would not be so sad. So we will go together to-morrow, and picture the home that we will make it, and the life that we will live there; and I shall feel her

upon this golden future, when her life will be bound up in mine? Except in silent gratitude for what has come to me at last, I would not touch the past. My thirty years hold much that I would fain forget.

When will they give her to me? Will they keep me long waiting for my treasure? How thankful I should be if I were not obliged to be away so soon, but yet that is a cowardly wish. There are weeks of happiness in store for me before November comes, and I need be absent from my love only just half a dozen days. I should be a churl indeed to resent or chafe at that.

September 6th.

I cannot tell how many hours we spent at the Rookery to-day in idle happiness, talking—I suppose as lovers always will—of the glorious future vaguely stretched before us, and of that wonderful present which flies so fast beneath our feet; never touching the past, save once, and it was only thus. When we were leaving the little home which, in our imagination, we had

filled with warmth and love and brightness, I took my darling into my arms for just one minute, and kissed her long and tenderly, while my heart was filled with gratitude, and strong and silent in its new resolves.

But before I let her go, and while she still looked so trustingly into my face, a strange, inexplicable compassion swept over my heart for the man who loved her in vain, and who, I knew without a word from her, had never kissed the sweet fresh lips. I should not have told her this, only that, with a touch upon my hand, she wondered what was my thought.

But, when I told her, she did not laugh as I had felt she would ; she only asked me, innocently and wistfully, if these were not my first kisses also.

My heart felt heavy in that moment, as she stood with such a questioning in her eyes, and my hand went softly down upon the pure, lifted brow. But I suppose she could not read my silence, as she might have done ; for presently she asked the question again, with a little confident smile upon her lips.

‘It depends, my love,’ I said, touching her lips again, as certainly I had touched no other lips in all my life, ‘on what we call kissing.’

We left the pretty spot, and sauntered homeward in the autumn sunshine, while my darling laughed and talked and raced with me, and was as happy as I felt. And when we met Mr. Lee, he stroked his daughter's cheek with his brown hand, and told me he knew the name of the best rose-grower in the world.

October 14th.

I think my darling's happiness is almost equal to my own. How beautiful she looked this morning when she asked me why the whole world seemed so much fairer than it used to be! Could I not tell her how to me all Nature whispers in its fullest harmony—'She loves you! She you love is yours!'

Each day we go now to the Rookery for a little, and watch it growing into a perfect home for us. In my great content I feel that 'no grass springs up so fresh, so green, so plentiful as mine.' What a long breath I drew to-night, as we stood looking down upon the Golden

Valley—golden indeed in this wonderful October moonlight—and her hand was warm and safe in mine !

‘Jerome,’ she said, ‘you love it so ; and yet you will leave it ?’

‘But not for long, my darling—only for six short days.’ Yet, as I spoke, I knew that to me they would seem longer than they could to her.

‘You are quite obliged to go, Jerome ?’

‘Quite obliged, my dearest. But not until the sixth ; and by the thirteenth I shall be at home again.’

Home again ! How eagerly, how gladly I shall return to my heart’s desire !

I would not have spoken again to-night of our parting—I always try so hard in her presence to forget it—but Thisbe herself, when we reached the lawn gate at home, turned and leaned against it, looking once more down the moonlit valley, while I looked only at her. And I think that when she spoke at last, her words had little to do with the thought that went before.

‘I wonder when Edith Karne will come back to Devonshire ?’

answered. 'She is to be with her mother and brother for a few weeks longer in London. I wonder when I shall go to London, Jerome? Tom and I were——'

I understood her sudden silence and the soft, bright blush; for Tom had told me only yesterday how it had been planned that this autumn he should take his sister for her first glimpse of town, but that of course he would not carry out that plan, as she was so soon to leave home for good.

'When you go, dear one,' I said, 'it will not be for a hurried journey, such as mine is to be. When I take you, time will be our own, I trust; and you shall see London at its best.'

'And is it not London at its best that you are going to see, Jerome?'

I laughed, yet something in her words, or in her eyes, brought to me in that quiet hour a keen and terrible foreboding, which yet I fought against and would not grasp. Why was Fate so unkind as to call me away just now? Why should the old life keep this grip upon me and

hold me back, when the new life lay so fair before me? Must even such a motive as I have, be strong enough to separate us now, before I have taken my darling to my heart, and told her——

‘Jerome,’ she said, brightly, and gently breaking my gloomy thought, ‘I try to remember that you might be a sailor, and have a long voyage to take before you could—could feel ready to take your own house; or a soldier, and have a still more terrible risk to run. When I think of these things, your few days’ absence seems so different—just a blessing, Jerome.’

‘If I could only think so!’ I answer, brokenly. ‘But it seems to me that there is nothing worse. Only one thing comforts me, Thisbe. This separation must be our last. Promise that, my love.’

It was an unnecessary and exacting request, for had she not promised me that on the last day of this good year, I might win my wife? Yet, instead of rebuking me, she laid her gentle hand on mine, and promised once again.

November 5th.

We paid to-day our last visit to the home that is in preparation for us. How ridiculously

cause the dear home and love and hope to slip from me, because for a few days my hand cannot clasp my darling's, or her voice reach my ear? Foreboding! What is there to forebode? Yet I have tried to reason myself out of this womanish nervousness, and cannot. It is just as if some vague, dim shadow followed me, which vanished when I turned and questioned it, yet, when I went upon my way, was ever there.

It was that which made me, for a moment to-day, forget all my gratitude for the home that had received me, and the gift that had been given me, and wildly wish it were my *wife* that I was leaving behind me—my wife, bound to me evermore, through good report or ill. But surely I shall be thankful all my life that I did not tell her of this selfish desire.

‘Thisbe,’ I said, my voice broken in spite of all my efforts, as we stood in our own future home, watching the solemn twilight deepen on the river and the woods, ‘no parting, in its deep and bitter sense, is possible between us two for ever; is it?’

‘None!’ she said. And, just as my words were troubled and passionate, hers were firm and quiet in their great trustfulness.

‘Our betrothal bound us as solemnly in spirit, Thisbe, as our marriage can. Oh, my love, you feel this so?’

‘Yes; I have always felt it. Why are you troubled so to-night?’

‘And it is such a little time, is it not, my darling, till the last day of this bright year?’

‘Yes.’

‘And, my wife—ah, let me call you wife just once, while you whisper one dear word to me!’

But I could see now that this new agitation in my manner disturbed her; and so I shook it from me, like the mean feeling that it was, and remembering how I had tried before to leave her, as if it might have been an easy thing, I soothed her, in that grave, protecting way which sometimes makes her smile and ask me where I learned my many moods.

I took her hands in mine, and raised them to my lips, and held them there; as if in this peaceful, shadowy eventime our parting might become but a more solemn, if a sadder, betrothal.

she stood on the platform and watched me go. I was grateful—sad as they looked—to see tears standing in her bright, undrooping eyes; for my own ached in their yearning, and I felt what a relief the tears might be.

‘Only six days!’ So I say to myself, again and again, as the fast train carries me to Scotland. ‘Only six days!’

And then I look back six days, to judge of how long a time it is, and smile to find how fleetly they must have passed, for all those six days seem like yesterday. And I try not to listen to the voice reminding me that Thisbe was with me through those days, while through these I shall have but her memory, except that one letter which she will to-morrow send me to Glasgow. But I may write to her. I may write to her each day, and remind her of how quickly that New Year’s Eve is coming—I shall believe it while I write, and tell her so, though just now it seems so far away—and that this thought is the sunshine on my way. I have brought a book, and I try to read, that my thoughts may rest a little from my own hopes and fears. But

presently the story, despite its powerful verse, hurts me strangely, and I throw aside the book, and try to interest myself in my fellow-travelers, and in the country that we pass through. But it is of little use. Everywhere I see my love's sweet face, and the wistful questioning of her eyes; while everywhere I see, too, those haunting words I have so lately read. Only two lines, yet every sound of the bright winter morning echoes them—

‘As I turned, there stood

In face of me my wife—stone still, stone white.’

What, in such lines, dare touch my darling's name within my heart? What is this horrible oppression upon me? We are rushing through one of the fairest bits of England, and every moment, in this speed of ours, brings nearer that bright hour which reunites us. Why cannot I rise, like a man, and shake off this weak and childish fear?

Is there always such a vague shadow of foreboding when lovers part? I knew so little of it. I could not have fancied it would bring this pain and heaviness. But of course it must be always so; and why should this unrest of mine be anything deeper than regret at leaving her I love? I will talk now to anyone

Oh, my love! If we but meet in happiness
once more, no parting, and no shadow from the
past, shall sever us!

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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